

LEADING MAGAZINE OF GAMING, COMPUTER AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE GALAXY THIS IS

NAG

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PLAYSTATION

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PREVIEWED

Dead Rising 2 <

Portal 2 <

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Luke... there... are...
other.... previews +



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As Yoda once said...

On the DVD

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- Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days
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 Puzzle Agent
 Storm over the Pacific

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Backwards this text is, umm, you must?



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A long time ago...



StarCraft II is here, but secretly I can't wait for *Diablo III*. *StarCraft II* is so 2010. Jokes (that actually makes sense later) aside, *StarCraft* is a very significant game for me because the original was the first review I ever wrote for NAG (back in 1998). Yes, I have been here that long... God... so very long... sigh. But that's a topic for my therapy session later.

It's also a huge game for everyone else in the office, and, like the town bicycle, everyone wanted to have a go... at writing something about it. So, instead of putting my foot down, I just let it happen... and we ended up with six pages of high scores and love. We probably overdid it a bit to be honest but at least it shows we're not jaded yet. :)

What is interesting, and I suggest you read this whole magazine (especially the news, previews and features) with this in mind: In the news we talk about game announcements and snippets. Previews are usually put together after a little hands-on testing of, sometimes terrible, beta code or even as little as a simple developer Q&A or interview with a handful of screens and some concept artwork. Rarely (like with *The Force Unleashed II*) do we get to play a polished and almost finished game for a preview in NAG.

Regardless, what usually ends up happening is we drag all this stuff out from under wherever we get it, compile and rub it until it shines or breaks and then present it in NAG. You reader types then take everything in, form an opinion, talk to your friends or mail us if you disagree with something and life goes on.

The interesting part comes when you have to match up those expectations based on years of snippets and hyping with a finished product – like *StarCraft II* – with 12 years of expectation, news, hype, information and whatever rumours you chose to believe. How can any game stand up to all of that – especially considering it invented whole new ways of thinking when it was released? Admittedly, *StarCraft II* is a bad example because it really is so completely amazing it's hard to write about without sounding like someone is paying you for your positive opinion – it's just one of those games. Everyone got lucky.

As for the rest, don't you find that new game announcements – like the developers of *Borderlands* are rumoured to be finishing *Duke*, or id Software's *Rage*, or Electronic Arts' rumoured *Syndicate* reboot or Criterion's new *Need for Speed* – are so much more exciting in your head than when you play them? There are so few games that cross the divide between imagination and hype and reality that gamers are in a constant state of disappointment

with their passion and hobby. Has anyone gotten over it and stopped hoping and dreaming? If you have (or haven't) let us know.

rAge & THE NAG LAN 2010

We're both happy and sad to say that all 2,080 NAG LAN tickets sold out in just over 36 hours. I'm sad because each year I know there are hundreds of disappointed gamers out there that didn't get a ticket, so I promise that next year we will have more seats available no matter what happens – even if we have to take rAge to a bigger venue in 2011.

Now, I'd like to say big hearty thanks to our sponsors: WiFi Direct for the Internet (remember this is only for DRM, Steam etc. activations and not browsing and other nonsense), BT Games for giving all the LAN guys a R100 voucher, HP for coming to the party with the network set-up, Intel for 12 cracker-jack servers flown in from Europe and, last but not least, our newest best friends Dell and Alienware for making awesome things happen.

Now, remember that rAge is happening 1, 2 and 3 October 2010 at the Coca-Cola Dome at Northgate. No concrete details are available (everyone is always so secretive), but you'll get incredible discounts from all the retailers (both games and hardware). I know there are at least 20-30 new games on the show floor that are only coming out after rAge 2010 is long gone, and we've got a few international developers coming along to talk to the press and public. The NAG stand is going to rock this year, and watch out for our monster gaming rig competition sponsored by Corex again. It's always a blast and we look forward to seeing you there.

APOLOGIES

Sorry about the *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* demo on the August DVD. It was time restricted and says 'version expired' when you try to run it. A way around is to change your system clock. The official excuse from the lame developers is that it was an unofficial leaked demo, which we all know is rubbish.

Michael James
[Editor]



COVER STORY

When you mix *Star Wars*, London and *Inception* you get good things. When you mix airports, hotels without bathrooms and Russian taxi drivers you get bad things. But travel tips aside, we were invited by Activision to the UK to play *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II*.

It's on our cover because, like dinosaurs, Lara Croft and men with guns and beards, *Star Wars* sells magazines and everyone that plays games loves spending time in a galaxy far, far away.

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RedTide: You can't really quantify what Dane does on a month-to-month basis...



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Letter of the Moment

From: Brendan**Subject:** Pew Pew Pew

"O KAY, SO THE MIGHTY E3 has come and gone and now both Sony and Microsoft have shown their cards. The unveiling of Kinect seems to be a moment in the past. But the question still remains, that, if Kinect requires 'no controller' what in the world is going to happen to shooting games. I mean, I reckon in about three to five years, every game on the market will require Kinect to play and if that is the case, will we be using our fingers as a Dragunov? We all went through the stage as children where using our fingers as a gun seemed to be the height of awesomeness (well at least some of us did) but now will gaming stoop this low? The possibility of still using the control for shooting games sounds appealing enough, but that ruins the promise of 'motion gaming'.

The main marketing ploy by Sony and the Move has been that whilst it is still motion gaming, the

Move has buttons. Kevin Butler pointed out perfectly that because it has buttons, it provides a stable balance for motion and shooting games. Courtesy of the June issue of *NAG*, we saw the new gun design for the Move. Now that's all fine and dandy but, for an avid Xbox fan, does this allow the Move to go one-nil up? The Move has always sat second fiddle to Kinect but could this throw it into first place? You be the judge. Unless Microsoft can come up with a solid solution to this lack of thought, the innovation competition will fall safely into Sony's hands. Perhaps if Microsoft can design a gun that syncs with the Xbox (in a Guitar Hero sense) then maybe all of this wouldn't be too bad. A big hefty machine gun and a pistol with hip holster to match would send Xbox into a new era of shooting games. At the time of writing I am unaware of a solution to the issue of shooting games. Perhaps you could fill me

in on this issue or if not give me your thoughts. Thanks for the great magazine – keep it going!"

For the longest time I didn't think that first-person shooters could work on a console. I'm a PC gamer after all, and I need a mouse and keyboard to play games like that... right? Or so I thought. This all changed when I forced myself to finish all the available Halo games on the Xbox 360. I sat down and actually used the

controller and ended up enjoying the experience, on my couch, in the Halo universe despite my mindsets/misconceptions/etc. So, while nothing has popped up on the radar about shooting games and the Kinect, my past experience has taught me never to judge something until I've given it a good, honest try. There's a lot of raw potential out there now and always consider that just because you can't see how something will change the world that doesn't mean it won't. Ed.

From: Nickey**Subject:** Out to get that b4st4rd.

"H I THERE, FIRST OFF, great magazine – I've been a reader of *NAG* for the past 10 years, and the magazine only gets better and better. This is the first time I'm writing to you guys. I just got my August copy of *NAG*, read the Ed's note and then got to the letters page. My blood started boiling as I read the 'Letter of the moment.' This so-called Jake guy is a <beep>, and I would like to know if I can have his address, so I can go bomb his house. I have never bombed a house before, but since I've never written a letter to *NAG* either, there is always a first time for everything. I love *NAG*, I love zombies, I love NVIDIA and if something is not advertised in *NAG*, then I don't buy it. I live by *NAG*'s reviews for games and hardware and without it I would be lost. Thanks for the great magazine, I will always buy it – your loyal fan.

This is what happens when loyalty and crazy collide. We love you man! ;) Ed

From: George**Subject:** Why C.S Still Rocks

"W HY COUNTER-STRIKE STILL ROCKS. 1. It requires so little... [Snip, and 500+ words later, Ed] ... all about. Thanking you kindly."

Nope, I checked everything very carefully and Counter-Strike still definitely sucks the big one, Ed.

From: Ismail**Subject:** September letter

"T HERE I WAS AFTER a hard days' work, exhausted, bored, when a brilliant theory sparked my mind.

Have you ever stopped for a second while playing CODMW2 to ponder about what source of energy has kept your body running for the past 11 hours? Yip! KFC, McDonald's, Steers, etc. Ladies and gentlemen, these are the true heroes because without these essentials the world of gaming would not rotate. Think about it... How would you collect eagle feathers in AC2 or make

campers suffer in COD, how would *NAG* be produced if you didn't have a 'nutritious' meal. It wouldn't work, that's why these are the true 'flag-bearers' of gaming because they provide us comrades with provisions so we can carry-out our days work [making campers suffer]. It's strange but it's true. The FG equation is always correct, Satisfaction = Games + Good Food!"

Did someone put something in the water this month? These letters are getting crazier and crazier... Ed.

From: Rikus**Subject:** We appreciate

"F OR MORE THAN A decade we have

Froamed the pages.

On works and words we doted, those of *NAG*'s sages.

Returning monthly to her beloved halls. Mother *NAG* is bountiful; she cares for her children.

Over, ever, again, she imparts her erudition.

Running our hands and soul over the sacred material.

Becoming one with the tidings technological, ethereal.

Impart once more your blessing, magazine we love.

Dart again unto our eyes from the bow that is your staff."

I promised I wouldn't cry. <sniff> Ed.

From: Stephen**Subject:** Dreams

"B EING FAIRLY YOUNG AND still in high school I have many dreams. My biggest dream is to get myself into the creative industry, specifically the gaming industry. Buying *NAG* and reading up on all these latest creations from out of someone's head, as an artist, drives me bonkers to get out a pencil and create a character or scene. I found that if you want to get into the gaming industry and make a good living from it, South Africa is just not the place. Successful game studios and quality training is close to

»» **Shorts [extracts of LOL from NAG reader letters]**

"I was eating biltong and drinking Coke and I was only 3 years old."

– JT

"I invited the zombies to my home and they stumbled over my *NAG* collection whilst chasing my cat."

– Avril

"But a part of me dies when I see fully grown men play Hanna Montana for the sake of those easy to earn trophies."

– OM3G4

"Not for publication."

– Brian

100% overseas and certainly not cheap.

But this problem did not close the curtains on my dream but opened a possible window into the future. Why does South African talent have to leave and go overseas to be used? The thing is there is hardly anyone willing to realise this talent and pump money to get it working in a 'third world' country. So my dream became not only to get into the gaming industry but to get it to South Africa in studio form. Okay, now you start to see my youth and ignorance, but we are talking about a dream here and I'm positive I'm not the only one with it.

If this road heading towards games produced in South Africa was made, it would be like every other major roads work in South Africa and take longer than expected. However the outcome would be mind-blowing and awesome for South Africa."

*You know what they say – if flying to the moon was easy everyone would be doing it. The real trick is to stay true to yourself and follow your dreams and you can't go wrong. You have vision and passion and sometimes that's enough to conquer the world. I do however suggest starting small and building up from there. Also, go to the *NAG* forums, there's a thriving game development community in South Africa already where you can chat with like-minded people. Ed.*

From: JT**Subject:** Internship

"D O YOUR GUYS AT NAG offer internship or freelancing job there at the NAG or do you not but that ever the answer is please and or thank you."

Your question is the answer, Ed.

From: Estehan**Subject:** Beavatar

"H I ED, JUST WANT to know when will the winner of the Beavatar completion be announced?"

You know, when we write stuff in the magazine there's always this desperate hope



megarom interactive

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.



Theo Mosienyane: "Created this over three days."

that somewhere out there someone actually reads what we write. Letters like this just shatter that fragile illusion and cause some staff to stay in bed on Friday mornings. Ed.

From: Bill
Subject: Help

"**I LOVE PLAYING GAMES BUT** I have never got the hardware part. And I can't read the hardware stuff and just learn like my brother. Maybe you could put hardware for noobs or something. You don't have to reply just consider it."

Consider it considered, Ed.

From: Luke
Subject: Savage 2 review
[This letter is printed exactly as we found it, Ed]

"**H**INAG HOW LONG was the first letter i sent you,oh only a month ago so now since my preview was at least in the inbox am going to do a review of savage 2,well savage 2 is an mmofps(i find that hard to belive actually)were players kill each other on a daily basis,but the mmofps has a twist considering that well there's a commander who builds(or rather from a RTS view)building such as towers to protect your base,outposts as spawn points and also acts as a expansion(surprise,surprise) which you can build mines to have income(for you and your teammates)but there is also players who act as units(underlings rather) and also do the hard fighting,oh and i almost forgot commanders build more buildings so that other players(units)do a better job,there are two factions only but they are both bad ass,there's the beasts who are like i guess nature loving hippies but can kick your ass and eat you alive,now how about the humans well they are bad ass(not to mention one of their units is a savage i repeat a savage!)and also they are steam punk,now the rest of the game goes like this,rush into a battle kill somebody and die,ya i know it's reative(oh dear lord i can not even spell that word properly)but it is fun(in a strange way)well i only have so much to say but i can't so if you are interested go to www.savage2.com."

This is what happens when you sprinkle crack cocaine on a mixture of not paying attention at school with too much time playing video games. Ed.

From: Xander
Subject: Exclusive offer

"**H**ELLO TO YOU SURVIVORS at the NAG HQ. I come to you concerning the Zombie Apocalypse. I am Dr. Z. Redfield. I work for "World United" and I am the lead [crack pot? Ed] scientist in the Department of "weapons against the infected, and ..THE CURE." I want to propose a trade. I have created a prototype weapon capable of MASS DESTRUCTION. The weapon fires a small sticky ball capable of sticking to any surface, this ball then fires out a small radioactive blast in a 5.13km radius around it, (humans are unaffected by the blast as far as I know, but this is just a prototype) attracting all Zombies in the target area to the ball. The ball then fires another blast in a smaller 3.34km radius once a sufficient number of Zombies is around it. After the second blast is fired please wait for 2-5 minutes, after waiting press the green button on the launcher to be granted full control of the Zombies. The one who is wielding the launcher can control the Zombies simply by thought. This weapon is known as "Crowd Control". Now I am willing to trade this beauty for the "letter of the moment prize", but why the letter of the moment prize you ask, well that is the final ingredient I need to complete ..THE CURE.. If you accept this offer in the next 36 seconds I will even throw in a Cryo Sentry Gun with a year's supply of ammunition which is great for parties and weddings. And thanks for the maggot cannon idea I might just incorporate it into the DFA space canon."

Declined – that's the most elaborate complicated weapon idea ever. It would be easier to just launch the space shuttle and crash it into a zombie than tinker with all those buttons and procedures, and why isn't the weapon destroyed in the first blast, since when are we immune to radiation, etc.? Come now. Think twice, invent once. Ed.

On the Forums

QUESTION: If you could plant an idea into the mind of someone in the gaming industry – who would it be and what idea would you plant? (If you've not seen Inception, go see it.)

Brunch23: Bobby Kotick - Donate 50% of your wealth to charity. You have enough money. You must retire.

DukeOfPrunes: I'll inception(ise) Peter Molyneux. Get him to send Horn to reclaim the rights to Dungeon Keeper from those evil commies, and make the third game in the series. Slapping mistresses in HD = hell yes.

Azraphael: While you are there, plant the seed for a new Syndicate game.

Graal: Gabe Newell. Hint: Episode 3.

echo: Valve, acquire the rights and make me a good Jurassic Park game already.

Cpt.Monde: Everyone at EA Sports. It's time for a new SSX

NecroWolf: Codemasters, Ubisoft, EA... actually the majority of developers and publishers. Just because it has online multiplayer, doesn't mean it shouldn't have split-screen.

CyberNinja: Yoshinori Ono, make Street Fighter VS Mortal Kombat and Capcom VS Namco. I'd also inception(ise) Rare/Microsoft. And have them create, Killer Instinct 3.

Uranium238: EA Los Angeles. To remake C&C 4 into something that is worthy of being the ending of this classic series

McDangerous: I'd implant into every game developer's mind that just because you play on a PC, doesn't mean you don't want to have friends over for a bit of split screen co-op fun. We aren't all creepy 45 year old loners y'know. Also, NFS Underground 3. Underground 2 with the Shift engine.

Demikid: Rockstar Games: Make San Andreas with the GTA IV engine and have the greatest GTA ever

Darranged: EA, Activision, Ubisoft and the rest of the publishers, I'd implant into their heads the idea that maybe it's time to take more risks when developing new titles, money be damned.

Shadowrend: The person: Executive Producer at Piranha Bytes. The idea: debugging while in production works a lot better than debugging the pre-release version on a lazy weekend. If you knew that 8 years ago, Gothic could have been one of the best PC RPG franchises ever.

FreddyAintDead: Person: Cliff Bleszinski. Idea: Get Epic games to make Unreal Championship 3

Miz3r: PLEASE ACTIVISION PLEASE make a new: Vampire The Masquerade

ZoRPA: Eidos, stop mucking about and finish Carmageddon! Also, to all game makers, always include an option to run your game in Windowed mode! Include coop campaign play via LAN on all FPS games, as well as split screen coop play on XBox.

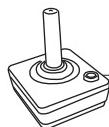
Slither: I would advise RAVEN SOFTWARE to re-think all the missed opportunities they had with SINGULARITY, and make a proper sequel, and I would make UBISOFT feel totally DISGUSTED with their online gaming requirements...

Dark Prince: EA – Please make a worthy more powerful ending to Tiberian Twilight, great game and then a weak ending. All the developers who made multiplayer online ONLY – Don't do it again, it failed, people hate you and LANers have a heart and a need as well.

Sci_Ghost: Blizzard Developers – Enable StarCraft 2 LAN play.

Let it all hang out on our forums – go on, everyone is welcome:
<http://www.nag.co.za/forums/>

I, Gamer



by Miklós Szecsei

Less is more

HAVE YOU PLAYED *LIMBO* yet? You really should – it's on a par with *Red Dead Redemption* as my gaming highlight of the year so far. I'd even say that I hold it as dear to me as I do *Shadow of the Colossus*, which is huge (no pun intended).

I just love those little gems that get thrown your way when you least expect them. Before *LIMBO* hit Xbox Live Arcade I had no clue of its existence at all. I saw a screenshot for it online and thought it looked intriguing, but it was one of those downloads on a whim that turned out to be an experience that'll last forever.

So what's it about? Well, that's actually kind of difficult to answer. Essentially it's a puzzle platform game, but for me games should ideally be more than a series of mechanics loosely stapled to a genre. Games should be an experience that sucks

Don't get me wrong, some mindless destruction has its place, but occasionally I like a bit of substance – you know, something to make you think a little deeper and maybe even feel something.

you into another world. Don't get me wrong, some mindless destruction has its place, but occasionally I like a bit of substance – you know, something to make you think a little deeper and maybe even *feel* something. Yeah, that's right: emotions and stuff.

LIMBO did exactly that, but perhaps that's because you're given very little to go on in the first place. There is no explanation and no reason for why a little boy wakes up in a monochromatic world populated by all manner of things that only desire to kill him. The snippet of detail provided is that his sister is in *LIMBO*, and that he wants to find her. You're left on your own to fill in the gaps. This deliberate choice by the designers to cut off all input is perhaps meant to mimic the boy's own isolation.

This isolation is the one thing the player and the protagonist have in common: you are both outsiders to this world of *LIMBO*, but you're both in it together. In subconsciously realising that, you become so undeniably connected to what you are doing that you cannot help being sucked in. With the most minimalist use of sensory input, the designers have created an experience of a lifetime.

So, have you played *LIMBO* yet?



» BREAK OUT THE CRYSTAL BALL

Electronic Arts has filed three new trademark registrations for *Syndicate*. This follows the copyright registrations from last year, as well as the perpetual rumour that *Riddick* developers Starbreeze Studios are working on the long-anticipated next title in the series.

The three trademarks are all labelled "Syndicate," and are filed under the categories of "Computer game software; Downloadable computer game software via a global computer network and wireless devices; Video game software;" "Entertainment services, namely, providing an on-line computer game; Provision of information relating to electronic computer games provided via the Internet;" and "Board games; Collectable toy figures; Hand held units for playing electronic games other than those adapted for use with an external display screen or monitor; Modelled plastic toy figurines; Playing cards."

If history, guesswork and our incredible knowledge of everything videogame-related were to come together, we'd guess an episodic release schedule with a strong multiplayer component and possible online content swapping. The last category is a tough one, but it could simply refer to a possible board game and/or action figure tie-in upon the game's release.

Oh happy day!

Iron Lore veterans reveal their current project

FOR THOSE WHO ENJOY hacking with their slashing, *Titan Quest* pretty much hit the spot. It offered a good mix of action, customisation and visuals, with a decent-enough story to hold the whole deal together. Sadly, the developers, Iron Lore, were closed down in 2008 due to lack of funding, but shortly after, the core members of the studio went off to establish an indie project by the name of Crate Entertainment. Well, it's finally been revealed what Crate has been up to all this time – developing a spiritual sequel to *Titan Quest* in the form of *Grim Dawn*.

There will be many similarities between the two games, the most notable of which will be the visuals (it's using the same engine as *TQ*, albeit with a number of tweaks) and the skill system, which will feature five character classes that can be interchanged to create a two-class combination. Features include a dynamic weather system, destructible environments, plenty of multiplayer options, and camera rotation. There will be an NPC faction system that will

require a bit of diplomatic balancing on the players' behalf to access merchants, quests and items. You will also be able to build powerful weapons and items by collecting blueprints and their necessary components.

As was the case with *Titan Quest*, the developers are going to ensure that the modding community forms a core part of the title's longevity. To aid in this, there is a new, more powerful and less bug-ridden quest and conversation system to tinker with, as well as all the other tools you'll need to create your own weapons, locations or entire story-driven campaigns.

Crate hasn't announced anything even resembling a solid release date yet, but the team is working hard to ensure that standards and quality are the order of the day; it'll almost definitely be worth the wait when it eventually arrives. They're also self-funded this time, and will publish the title themselves (distribution through Steam is planned). If you'd like to support these brave developers, visit www.grimdawn.com and pre-purchase your copy now.

Odd murmurs return

The *Oddworld* series is larger than most may realise: seven standalone games spanning a number of platforms, developers and publishers (the original publishers GT Interactive, as well as THQ and Electronic Arts), and five cancelled projects, but it's been some time since we've heard any positive news on the next in the series. Co-founder of Maxis, Jeff Braun, confirmed in 2008 that "something" was happening, but didn't mention any details on platform, release schedule (it was likely to be episodic) or even publisher. All that we knew then was that he was working with the original developers, Oddworld Inhabitants.

Now something new has been announced. Development studio Just Add Water has announced that they too are working with Oddworld Inhabitants on the next game in the series, to be released across multiple platforms. What's not clear at this stage is whether or not this is the same project that Jeff Braun was involved in or something new entirely. The last we heard from Braun he was at THQ where he was a testing and QA supervisor on *Darksiders*, *Deadly Creatures*, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* and *Saints Row 2*, so perhaps his schedule has opened up.

According to Just Add Water's website, we can expect more details over the coming months of the multiple *Oddworld* projects that they're working on.



Madness Returns to Wonderland

Since its release in 2000, American McGee's *Alice* has been the target of much affection from shooter and platformer fans alike. Developed on the id Tech 3 engine, *Alice* gave a mature, violent and down-right insane perspective of the children's tale, and before long, fans of the game were clamouring for more. Rumours passed alongside the years, while American McGee moved around the game development industry, founded a couple of studios and now, we finally have an answer.

Alice: Madness Returns is in development by one of McGee's studios, Spicy Horse. A Western studio based in Shanghai, China, Spicy Horse is over 70-strong and is the studio behind *American McGee's Grimm*, which was released in July 2008 through GameTap. Despite his name being missing from the title, American McGee is still working on *Madness Returns*.

The sequel will take place eleven years after the tragic fire that took Alice's family. After a year in the asylum, Alice has been released into the care of a London psychologist, but is in no way safe from the nightmares and hallucinations that haunt her. Seeking solitude in the only place she feels she can trust, Wonderland, Alice returns there (how, exactly, we're not sure) to find the place in tatters in her absence. A great evil is descending upon her world and it's up to Alice to save it, and herself, from the madness that consumes them both.

BioShock 2's final DLC

BioShock 2 fans should begin preparations to receive the sixth and final downloadable content pack for this steampunk underwater adventure. Entitled *Minerva's Den*, the DLC will give players control over a new character that will team up with Brigid Tenenbaum to explore the area of Rapture Central Computing. You'll get access to new "high-tech weaponry" as well as a single additional plasmid. Enemies in RCC are tougher than ever before; splicers now possess elemental powers and security bots will have rocket and lightning bolt attacks. On top of all of that, there will be a new Big Daddy type to contend with.

No release date or price has been confirmed yet, but *Minerva's Den* is in development for PS3, Xbox 360 and PC.



»

SHIFT INTO SECOND GEAR

EA has confirmed that a sequel to the hit racer *Shift* (which sold over four million units) is in development. The game is due for release sometime between the beginning of January and the end of March next year for console and PC. While it can't be confirmed at this stage, various informal Internet sources (including a LinkedIn profile belonging to senior programmer Chris McClure), it looks like *Shift 2* is once again in development at Slightly Mad Studios.

»

SUPPORT TOONSTRUCK, GET MORE TOONSTRUCK

Ever heard of *Toonstruck*? We don't blame you if you haven't. A point-and-click adventure released back in the '90s, *Toonstruck*'s cast was made up of Christopher Lloyd (Doc Brown from *Back to the Future*) and a bunch of cartoons. The game's sequel, which was to be built from a significant amount of content that was cut from its predecessor, was unfortunately never finished. The game's music director Keith Arem still holds the rights to release the cut content in an updated version of *Toonstruck*. This revised version would include the original game together with the cut content and could be released on iPad, the Internet and the like. The thing is, Arem would need to see "tremendous fan support to justify its release", which hasn't exactly happened as of yet, aside from a few online petitions that have popped up. Want to play *Toonstruck* again, now with more content? Then go online and get your support on.



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The Indie
Investigator
by Rodain Joubert



An extreme-free (indie) society

IF THERE'S ONE MAJOR PR stumbling stone within today's world of independently produced games, it's the overzealous efforts of well-intentioned – yet hopelessly misguided – defenders of the indie market. People, who invariably puke rainbows over even the most astoundingly inept of offerings that come from all the "little developers" out there, with more care for its source than its actual merit as a product, are busy killing everybody else's impressions of the non-mainstream industry on a daily basis.

I've met quite a few people who don't like indie games. Some of them are pretty good friends of mine. From what I often gather, they've been put off in the past by too many "recommended" games which have been genuinely clumsy, inaccessible or just plain awful. This is a huge pity – the negative first impressions that they get tend to stick, and soon even the best indie offerings end up getting thrown into the same slops bucket as the lesser ones.

The negative first impressions that they get tend to stick, and soon even the best indie offerings end up getting thrown into the same slops bucket as the lesser ones.

It should be stated here: not all indie games are good. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that most of them are crap. It's not something that can be avoided – holding up every new "art game" like a handful of diamonds just because it's following a fashionable ideal is no way to realistically look at independent development – and there's only so much shoddiness and corner-cutting that can be blamed on limited resources and a moth-eaten budget.

If the indie scene is to become at all respected by those who dismiss it entirely, or simply can't wrap their heads around the "deeper" concepts that indies like to tout (as if the player should be required to appreciate games academically instead of just having fun!) we need to look at games far more realistically. Some pretty simple questions can be asked. Is it fun? And what potential obstacles to fun exist? If a game doesn't satisfy certain core criteria, then can it really be appreciated on any level at all?

The indie scene isn't horrible, and it certainly isn't perfect either. It's at least as involved – and hit-or-miss – as the regular games industry, and it couldn't hurt for people to start understanding this more, no matter what side of the fence they actually sit on.



Blizzard deletes map "because we can"

THE NEW BATTLE.NET'S CUSTOM map scene practically exploded the day that the map editor released during *StarCraft II*'s beta phase. Then, once custom map sharing went live, thousands of maps began to flood the system. Tower Defence maps, *DotA*-likes, RPG maps; you name it, they came out in droves. Of course, whenever you hand a custom content tool over to the Internet, certain tools on the Internet think it'd be awfully funny to make content that involves body parts best discussed behind closed doors, and other rude things. As a result, Blizzard has decided to take a hard stand against any map that it deems inappropriate.

It began with the TD map known as Ultimate Tank Defence, which Blizzard pulled from the system without even a hint of

explanation. When questioned why on the Blizzard forums, the company responded rather bluntly.

"Because we can. Literally." Said community manager Bashiok. "We have a support department now of size and ability to enforce these types of things. It simply wasn't possible when our in-game support used to consist of approximately 20 technical support agents. We did, however, actually police *Warcraft III* maps to a small degree if they were reported. But it was a rather archaic process."

Take it as a warning, and perhaps a clue of things to come. Keep your maps clean and, our own advice, free of any references to commercial products, if you'd like to gain success as a map maker on Blizzard's new Battle.net.

»
KILLZONE 3 FOR EVERYONE!

At the time of writing this, Guerrilla Games and Sony have launched a new Killzone 3 website (which is nothing more than a login screen at the moment) that essentially confirms that a Killzone 3 public beta will happen. It's not surprising considering that the same was done for Killzone 2. Keep an eye on [beta-login.html](http://killzone.com/kz3/beta-login.html).

Four new playable species announced for The Old Republic

BioWare's upcoming MMORPG *Star Wars: The Old Republic* has had information drip fed to salivating gamers for months now. The latest offering from the acclaimed developers is news that all of the classes will feature non-human options, including Sith Purebloods who are the progenitors of the Sith race and fill the non-human option for the character class of Sith Warriors. The Miraluka (who kind of look like blind, albino humans) are available as powerful Jedi Knights – so powerful that they don't even need eyes because they just see everything through the force. The Miralans are green-skinned aliens who can be selected for the Jedi Consular character class – a class that leads Republic Forces into the fray and is capable of powerful, force-based attacks. The final species announced are the Zabrak. You all know what these guys look like (if you don't, think Darth Maul from *Episode I*) and should know that they are Sith Inquisitors – the most aggressive of members of the Sith ranks. No release date or pricing structure has been announced for *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, but you can be sure we'll update you as soon as we know more.





But will it blend?

In the world of fighting games, everyone has their favourite. *Tekken* fanboys will defend King's ridiculous combos to the death, while *Street Fighter* nuts will spend hours explaining to you how 2D fighting is the best thing since the pixel. The rest of us just like to play games about people beating each other up, and now finally we won't have to choose which camp we belong to just to get a few Hadoukens out.

Announced at this year's San Diego Comic-Con were two new franchises in the fighting genre: *Tekken X Street Fighter* and *Street Fighter X Tekken*. No, we haven't lost our minds; these are indeed two separate titles. The first will be produced by *Tekken* developers Namco Bandai, and will feature familiar *Tekken* gameplay and styling including 3D arenas and a tag-team system. The latter is being developed by Capcom and will stick to the formula put in place by *Street Fighter IV*. Both games will feature playable characters from both series.

Development of both games will take place completely separate from each other, with both teams agreeing not to share any information. Each team will be responsible for designing their opposing team's iconic characters, and fitting those character's particular gameplay styles into their new fighting mechanics. While we don't yet have any solid information on release dates, one thing is for sure: this is going to be one of the most interesting developments the fighting genre has ever witnessed.



NCSoft forced to pay up

Richard Garriot is a nutcase. No matter how much we think fondly of this man's huge contributions to CRPGs and MMORPGs in particular, we just can't get that fact out of our heads. No matter; he's also had a bit of a bumpy ride out of the gaming industry, through an insane asylum or two (not a fact) and back into the industry through the side entrance, and he's tired of being messed around by his former employees NCSoft, who published the doomed *Tabula Rasa*. In retaliation for what Garriot called a "re-characterisation" of his departure from the publisher, the man sued NCSoft for his profit lost during the forced sale of his shares during a particularly bad slump in share price. If he'd been allowed to hang on to them, they'd be worth a lot more now than what they were when he sold them. The law suit has finally drawn to a close, with the jury rewarding Garriot the sum of \$28 million. Perhaps this newfound cash will help Lord British finally get that web-based social gaming business off the ground. Yay?

>>

NINTENDO: 1, PIRATES: 0

The importing, advertisement and sale of R4 cartridges, and all carts of a similar nature manufactured and imported by Playables Limited, has been banned in the UK. Frankly, we're surprised that it took this long for this call to be made, but at least Nintendo finally has these piracy carts under control.

For those not in the know, R4 carts (as well as the M3DS, DS One Supercards and a number of others from Playables) allow users to run illegally obtained versions of DS games on their consoles without the need for permanent modification. What this means, of course, is that Nintendo has potentially been losing millions of pounds in sales.

According to the ruling, it seems like the reason why this whole debacle took as long as it did was because Nintendo had to prove beyond a doubt that it had employed numerous security means to detect and reject attempted piracy cartridges, which Playables went out of its way to circumvent in each new iteration of the product. Nintendo was given leave to seize over 165,000 of these devices, but there's no indication as to how many are still in circulation; R4 carts have unfortunately been in the market for years. Still, it's a good start, and one that we hope will spawn similar court rulings elsewhere in the world.



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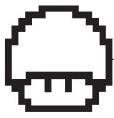
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Miktar's
Meanderings
by Miktar Dracon



Predications Come True

OH GAMERS, YOU PRECOCIOUS bunch. This week, a developer footnote revealed the Xbox 360 version of *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* would ship on two DVD discs with an option to install the game to a hard drive. Two years ago, this would have been headline material. See, back then the Interwebs said Xbox 360 was doomed because it lacked the Power of Blu-Ray. The growing games of tomorrow would outstrip the meagre capacity of the 360's old-fashioned DVD drive, and the PlayStation 3 would rise to the heavens on a tower of gigabytes.

An insoluble problem, to hear gamers tell it. You couldn't just wedge more storage into the Xbox. It's not like that thing has hard drive support... oh wait. But the sun didn't fall from the sky. Life went on.

Fanboys always predict the apocalyptic for Those Other Guys. The big joke: in hindsight it usually never comes to pass, and if it sort of does, it ain't the prophesied Total Existence Failure.

Developers grumbled occasionally. Every Xbox SKU got a hard drive or mass-capacity storage solution. And when 9GB of storage wasn't enough? "CLICK-INSTALL". Problem solved.

The point here isn't to dredge up the console wars, rah-rah-rah, but merely demonstrate the foolishness of arguing with absurdly exaggerated potentialities. Fanboys always predict the apocalyptic for Those Other Guys. The big joke: in hindsight it usually never comes to pass, and if it sort of does, it ain't the prophesied Total Existence Failure. (Remember 10 years ago when Nintendo was abandoning hardware to go third-party for Sony, because the GameCube was a failure? Any day now.)

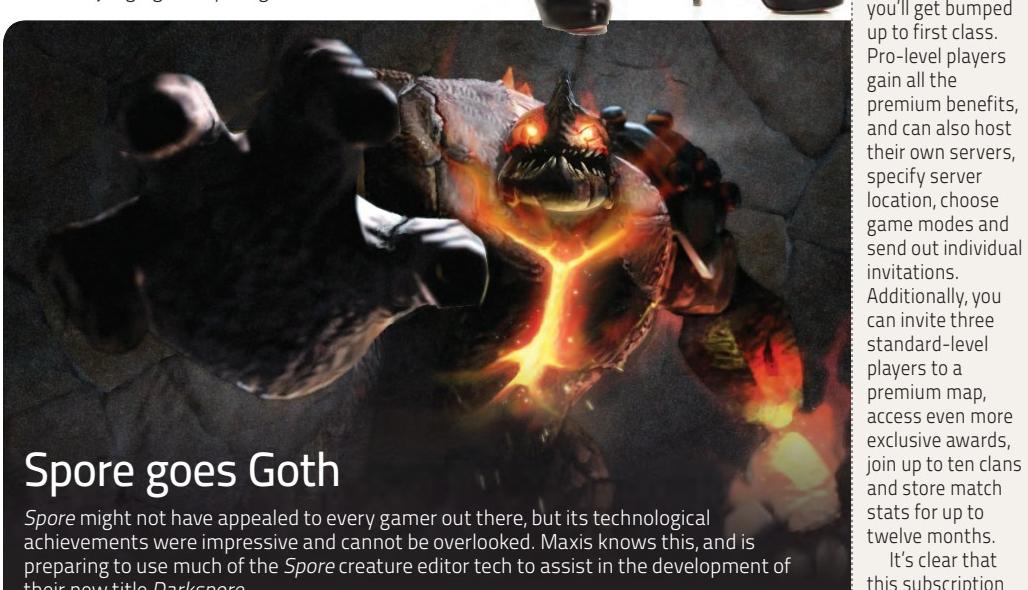
Every half decade or so, the cycle resets itself and people forget about all the failed 'sure-fire' predictions from the last go-round. In that case, grab a pail of popcorn. Within five years, NVIDIA will be out of the GPU game, Microsoft will be an Apple third party, and someone will be making a lot of money succeeding where all predicted abject failure.

One of these things may even come true!

A story mode for a fitness game?

JILLIAN MICHAELS – SHE'S that super-fit exercise guru who looks strong enough to bench-press an 18-wheeler without breaking a sweat. She'd also probably knock most men out with a well-placed right hook, but we're just saying that because we're jealous, slightly flabby gamers. Fortunately for our midriffs she's released a bunch of fitness games for the Wii, and her third instalment (wait, there were two of these already?) is called *Jillian Michaels' Fitness Ultimatum 2011*. While that in itself is hardly newsworthy, what's bizarre is that this upcoming title will feature a story mode. Yes, a story mode – in a fitness game. Has the industry gone nuts? Perhaps, but don't forget that NAG is not here to judge, but rather to provide impartial news pieces. This is what the game's developer had to say: "Jillian and the player use fitness skills and nutritional expertise in a series of missions to shut down Cureall, an evil food and drug corporation set upon world domination".

If Cureall is run by a camp, evil-genius kind of CEO, and if it has loads of villainous henchmen, then we might give this a go – even if it's only to see Jillian get beaten by loads of bad guys because we're too busy staring in amazement that a fitness game has a story mode to begin with. Not that we're judging or anything.



Spore goes Goth

Spore might not have appealed to every gamer out there, but its technological achievements were impressive and cannot be overlooked. Maxis knows this, and is preparing to use much of the *Spore* creature editor tech to assist in the development of their new title *Darkspore*.

Darkspore is an action game in which players will battle across numerous alien worlds to save the galaxy from the mutated forces of Darkspore. Four-player co-op play and competitive modes will make an appearance. Players will have to build up an arsenal of five genetic heroes from three classes with different combat abilities, and equip them with "tens of thousands of collectable body parts and armour." As you progress through the game, it will dynamically generate new and increasingly challenging worlds and enemies for you to deal with.

» QUAKE LIVE GETS FANCY

Quake Live might've been just the ticket for those looking for some oldschool, fast-paced and (since the release of local servers) relatively lag-free first-person shooting, but for many the only reason why they even bothered to try it out was its major draw-card: it didn't cost a cent to play. Now things are set to change, as the developers are introducing two paid-for tiers above the regular (and thankfully still supported) free players.

Premium level will cost you \$1.99 a month, billed annually, and will give you access to 20 additional maps, Freeze Tag mode, exclusive rewards, the option to create a clan and join up to five clans, custom profile wallpaper and six months worth of stored match statistics.

Cough up twice that amount and you'll get bumped up to first class. Pro-level players gain all the premium benefits, and can also host their own servers, specify server location, choose game modes and send out individual invitations. Additionally, you can invite three standard-level players to a premium map, access even more exclusive awards, join up to ten clans and store match stats for up to twelve months.

It's clear that this subscription model is targeted at pro gamers. Will *QL* suffer the same elitist fate as *Counter-Strike*? At this rate, almost definitely.



Will clinch and eye-gouge for food

Publisher THQ's last fiscal period saw them rolling in glorious moneys. They thanked *Red Faction: Guerrilla* and their *UFC Undisputed* series for that (although we're guessing that *Darksiders* – which sold over a million units in the US alone within four weeks of its launch – helped with that more than just a bit as well). This period, however, isn't looking very promising. The publisher lost \$30.1 million dollars this past quarter, due to slower sales of this year's *UFC Undisputed* title than expected. Oh, and no *Red Faction* release.

In response to all the lost cash, THQ possibly plans to slow down

the *UFC Undisputed* development cycle, extending their current 12-month development period to 15, 18 or 21 months – anything other than annual releases, according to THQ's Brian Farrell. Farrell also assured everyone that *UFC Undisputed* is "still a top franchise". They're currently planning how best to address this issue with the next title, *UFC Undisputed 2011*. Plenty of discussion is sure to be had between THQ and the UFC as to what should be done. Maybe when *Red Faction: Armageddon* hits in March of next year, THQ's financial reports will receive a much-needed boost.



A great deal for all the peg-leggers

If you somehow missed out on the excellent puzzle/adventure game *Machinarium*, or acquired it through less-than-legitimate means, then the developers, Aminata Design, have the perfect solution for you and the other estimated 85–95% of people who didn't pay for the game. They're selling the game for a meagre \$5 (R36) – a massive discount from the game's original selling price of \$20. Not only that, but with your purchase you'll also receive the game's soundtrack with a bonus track, *Pirate Amnesty*, as a way of saying "it's okay, we understand your ill-doings, now cough up and everything will be fine."

Machinarium will run on Windows, Mac or Linux, and has incredibly low system requirements. If you're in the market for a touching, clever and challenging puzzle game, then look no further than www.machinarium.net.

>>

NO CRAZY GESTICULATING FOR FABLE III...

...at launch at least, as it has been announced that Microsoft's Kinect peripheral will not function with Lionhead Studio's third chapter in its *Fable* franchise. Last year Peter Molyneux announced that *Fable III* would feature Kinect support saying, "Do you really think... knowing me... I wouldn't use something like Natal?"

Now, in keeping with Molyneux tradition, things seem to have been announced a little prematurely, as Kinect support will follow in a title update some time after the launch of *Fable III*. This is not unlike Quantum Dreams' update to *Heavy Rain* so as to enable PlayStation Move support. In *Fable III*'s case the reasons could be similar: the game will launch towards the end of October 2010, a week before the Kinect peripheral makes it into stores. Is it a case of the hardware missing the software's release date, or the software not being ready to utilise the hardware's ability in a meaningful way? Time will tell.

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The Evolution of...
Star Wars Games



1992 – Super Star Wars



1995 – Dark Forces



1998 – Rogue Squadron



2003 – Knights of the Old Republic



2005 – Republic Commando



2010 – The Force Unleashed 2



PC gamers: prepare to rage

Dragon Age II says goodbye to mod tools and its strategic camera on PC

BIOWARE'S MIKE LAIDLAW REVEALED in an interview with French magazine Joystick that the PC version of the sequel to *Dragon Age: Origins* is dropping its *Baldur's Gate*-style isometric camera in favour of the third-person camera that the console versions of the game will utilise. Laidlaw explained the change on the game's official website, having this to say: "For budgetary reasons, we focused our work on a third-person view that asks for very detailed and nice textures so that the player can admire the game with a close-up view. With an aerial view (isometric) we should cover much more ground and so create other textures. Now, the game mainly sold on console, so we're going the way of the audience." Before you stage a massive BioWare ragequit, however, consider this for a moment: "While we likely won't pull as far up as we did in *DA: O*, I have always felt that the key to tactical play was actually freeing your camera from the character you're controlling to issue precise orders, which is what we're tuning now. So, this means you can still

manoeuvre the camera around the battlefield and issue orders from a remote location, just as you could in *Origins*," said Laidlaw.

In addition, the modding toolkit that shipped with the original game will not return with the sequel. "The tools we're using to make *Dragon Age 2* are very, very close to the tools you guys have used to make your mods for *DA: O*. They're not identical, as we've made a few in-house improvements, but they're almost identical. As such, there isn't a new toolset to release, *per se*," said Laidlaw. "While we won't be releasing a toolset update in tandem with *Dragon Age 2*, we ARE investigating what it would take to update the community toolset to match ours, along with providing *DA 2* content in the future."

We're sure that news of this pair of changes is sure to drive fans and modders of the original title on PC crazy, but we'll wait for the game's release to see how the game is affected before making a snap judgement based on this.

Epic Mickey is possible on 360/PS3, says Spector

Wii exclusive *Epic Mickey* is specifically on the Wii because its control mechanism relies on gestures for the painting, turpentine tossing and such stuff that you'll be doing to manipulate the game world on your epic journey. It's also lovely because it gives your friends and family something to laugh at as you waggle about and look completely silly. Before, the PS3 and Xbox 360 were devoid of Wii-style motion control. Now, they've got it. Does gaming legend and *Epic Mickey* creator Warren Spector think that this means that the game could make its way to the more technologically powerful consoles? "Before Move and Kinect I probably would have said no, because the game is built around gesturing. Now, however, there's no reason technologically why we couldn't," said Spector, "That decision is really above my pay grade, and no one's asked me for a port. I've been a Nintendo fan a long time, and I've been pretty open about the fact that the *Zelda* games are some of my favourite of all time. So we're a Wii exclusive and I'm happy about that."

» NEW TALENT ARRIVES AT LUCASARTS

Clint Hocking makes games. Some of those games may be familiar—*Splinter Cell* immediately springs to mind, as does *Far Cry 2*. He used to work for Ubisoft Montreal as the Creative Director, then in April this year he resigned. Now he's stepped through the doors and taken up a cubicle at LucasArts as the new Creative Director on an as-yet unannounced project. The man definitely has some creative talent so having it combined with the intellectual properties held at LucasArts is a move that has potential. Perhaps we'll see Sam Fisher outfitted with a lightsaber. Or better yet, we'll see Sam Fisher outfitted with a lightsaber fighting off Afrikaners in a war-torn African country! Now that's AAA material right there.

» GAME ON(LINE)

Recently, Nielsen studied the time Americans spent online, and then broke their readings down into different activities. Social networking and blogging took up the largest portion of identifiable usage at 22%. The second largest portion? Online gaming of course, which accounts for 10.2% of the total time spent online by the average American Internet user. Email came in third place. Amusingly, 34.3% of the total time falls into a category loosely defined as "other". Wonder what **that** could be referring to?

Gaming Charts



May 2010 figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za

Sales by game platform

PS3

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa	2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
Red Dead Redemption	Red Dead Redemption
Mafia II	God of War Collection
Sports Champions (PS3 Move)	Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box
Racket Sports (PS3 Move)	FIFA 10

XBOX 360

Halo: Reach	XBOX 360
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
Madden NFL 11	Red Dead Redemption
Dead Rising 2	Halo 3: ODST
WRC 2010	Forza Motorsport 3
	FIFA 10

PS2

FIFA 11	PS2
Despicable Me	FIFA 09
Toy Story 3	FIFA 10
Bakugan Platinum	Need for Speed: Most Wanted
Dance Party Pop Hits + Mat	Rugby 2008
	Call of Duty 3

PC

StarCraft II	PC
The Sims 3: Ambitions	The Sims 3: Ambitions
The Sims 3: Fast Lane Stuff Pack	The Sims 3
Darksiders	CSI: NY
Tom Clancy's HAWX 2	Prince of Persia Trilogy Pack
	Splinter Cell Trilogy Pack

PSP

Toy Story 3	PSP
Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker	2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
FIFA 11	FIFA 2010
Assassin's Creed: Blood Lines	Pro Evolution Soccer 2010
Avatar Platinum	Burnout Dominator
	Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

WII

Super Mario Galaxy 2	WII
New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Wii Sports
PokéPark Wii: Pikachu's Adventure	2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
DDR Hottest Party 3	New Super Mario Bros. Wii
Sports Island 3	Wii Fit + Balance Board
	Super Mario Galaxy 2

DS

Pokémon Mystery Dungeon	DS
The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks	New Super Mario Bros.
Professor Layton and Pandora's Box	Mario Kart DS
Shrek Forever After	Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story
Tetris DS	Dr Kawashima's Brain Training
	Super Mario 64 DS

»

NEXT EVERQUEST IS EVERQUEST NEXT

Well, it's called *EverQuest Next* for now anyway – we're sure that title will change. While not much is known about the title at this point, it's been stated that it will be more of a series reboot than a direct sequel to *EverQuest* and *EverQuest II*, will focus strongly on PvP and will have a more engaging battle system. In addition, SOE president John Smedley revealed many upcoming developments for the franchise, including an expansion (dubbed *House of Thule*) for the hugely popular original game 11 years after its release that will add player housing, a bunch of new dungeons, new quests, new spells and more to be released on October 14th. Moreover, *EverQuest II* is going the free-to-play route that seems very popular of late. *EverQuest II: Extended* will feature a separate server set that will provide all the game's original content. All zones through *The Shadow Odyssey* will be accessible, with no transactions required. If you want to unlock more races, levels 80-90, new gear and a bunch of extras, that's where you'll need to whip out the credit card, or you can pay for a subscription. The game will also receive its own expansion in February next year (called *Destiny of Velious*), which will introduce flying mounts to many of the game's zones.

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Head in the clouds: BioShock Infinite announced

Ken Levine and his team of wizards have announced what they've been working on for the last two and a half years. They're taking *BioShock* to the skies. It may have *BioShock* in the title, but Rapture is gone. Big Daddies and Little Sisters are nowhere to be seen. This world isn't one filled with crazed splicers trying to shoot your face off for your ADAM. *BioShock Infinite* may as well be an entirely new IP. Set during a time when technology was evolving faster than bewildered folk could keep up with in the early 1900s, the new *BioShock* will take us beyond the sea and upwards to the floating city of Columbia, a city symbolic of the limitless potential and optimism that the world was feeling at the time. Levine isn't finished with some of the ideas and philosophies that the original *BioShock* boasted, and Infinite will expand, improve and refine everything that makes the series great.

The Beavatar



I'm in ur jungle,
hiding from ur doods

The story so far: Our poor badger has disappeared (somewhere in the über jungle of Pandora). He's easily distracted by bright lights... so you can imagine. We are looking for him and will let you know.

In the meantime the awesomeness of NAG has attracted someone else, a pretty blue thing that's still a little shy (this is our awkward way of saying she's hiding in the magazine). So, to win the prize you must now find Ney'turik, she's hiding in the magazine somewhere... Get going. Send your sitings to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'September Beavatar'.

August Winner



WIN!

One person who finds the Beavatar will win a hamper of goodies from NAG. Don't get too excited... It's just a bunch of crap lying around the office that we need to get rid of to make space for the new crap.



The WAR rages on

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Is still profitable and gaining new subscribers every month, according to developer BioWare Mythic.

In a recent interview with Eurogamer.net, general manager of the studio Eugene Evans tells the website how, at coming up to two years from launch, the game is seeing tens of thousands of trial players joining the servers every month. According to Evans, it's their endless trial system that's helped keep the game's head above water, transforming trial players into paying subscribers.

"We were able to present a new trial experience that gave people the time to discover what was great about the game," Evans said. "They weren't worried about trying to discover that in 10 or 14 days."

Producer Carrie Gouskos admitted that the studio might've set its goals a little too high, coming into the market branded as

the WoW killer.

"Maybe we attempted too much early on, making sure the player versus environment experience was as meaningful as the realm versus realm experience," she told Eurogamer.

"Right now, everything we're doing and where we're going and what the path of the game is, is focused on RVR. We know that's our strength. That's what our players who are playing right now want. And that's something we have a pretty good handle on."

Perhaps as a show of faith, EA has assumed both publishing and service rights for WAR Europe. GOA, a division of France Telecom, has been running the show since the game's launch in 2008, but Electronic Arts has now handed over control to BioWare Mythic to directly care for players connecting to the Euro servers, which includes us.

Action figures are so 2009

Last year, Ubisoft's action-figure packing *Assassin's Creed II* collector's edition was pretty damn great. This year, for *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (which is getting a number of different limited editions, some of which are region specific), they're ditching the action figures for something strangely eerie – a jack-in-the-box featuring a real-life recreation of one of the in-game doctors, needle in hand and all. If that's not enough to placate your perpetual desire for more cool stuff that is really useless but still totally awesome, then maybe the art book, a pair of exclusive in-game maps, the hard copy map of Rome and the bundled bonus disc will. That bonus disc is loaded with a making-of video, a sneak peak at the upcoming AC comic book, trailers and the game's soundtrack. GameStop in the US is getting their own exclusive collector's edition of the game which replaces the doctor with the Harlequin (a character for the game's multiplayer that only folks in the US who pre-order the title from GameStop will receive) for its jack-in-the-box. Doesn't really apply to us here in SA, but it's still awesome. All this will apparently cost \$100 (somewhere around R700). We need that jack-in-the-box.

» MAGIC: THE GATHERING NATIONALS

For those of you out there who happen to play Magic: The Gathering when you're not Zerg rushing noobs, here's some news for you: The National Championship is taking place in Sandringham, Johannesburg, at the Jabula Recreation Centre on the weekend of the 18th and 19th of September. More than 120 players will compete in the two main events on Saturday and Sunday, with a number of side events expected to take place throughout as well. While the main qualifiers have already been held all over the country over the last six months, you can still earn your place in the competition by heading over to the Jabula Recreation Centre on 17 September (the day before the event starts) for your last chance to participate in the nationals.

Other upcoming tournaments:

4/9: BT Games Eastrand Mall; BT Games Fourways

10/9: Top CD Wonderboom

11/9: Top CD Menlyn; Top CD Wonderboom

24/9: Top CD Wonderboom

25/9: Top CD Menlyn; Top CD Kolonade

LIMITED EDITION HALO REACH LEGENDARY NOW AVAILABLE FOR PRE-ORDER

the Legendary Edition comes with a 10 inch tall, 10 pound diorama statue featuring the members of Noble Team, the stars of the game.

A flaming Spartan helmet for multiplayer, as well as all of the contents of the Limited Edition, all packed inside a themed custom box.



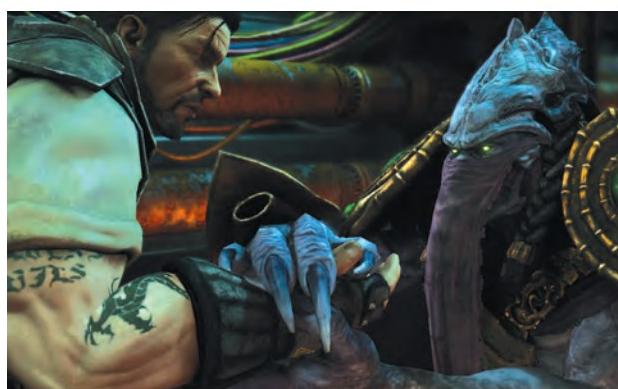
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Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *WRC: FIA World Rally Championship* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'September Caption'.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR: "Blizzard's script-writing team briefly featured some talent from fanfiction.net. Very briefly."



LAST MONTH'S WINNER: "Ate...wrong...mushroom..." – Jono Attfield

Rumour mill keeps churning

Rumours abound on the Internet that the excellent *Neverwinter Nights* franchise may get another title to join its ranks. Publisher Atari admitted recently that it's getting ready to announce another *Dungeons & Dragons* title. Then they went ahead and registered a number of domain names, all with the word "neverwinter" in them. With rumours of a *Neverwinter Nights* MMO having done the rounds a while ago, we're going to assume that that's what's going on, but perhaps this might be something else? More rumours here: Jon St. John, otherwise known as Duke Nukem (or at least the voice of the gum-chewing, bullet-spewing badass), tweeted this: "Had a great time in Seattle last week recording for DotA. The guys at Valve Software are awesome! Going to PAX? Might see you there - Sept 3-5." This isn't really that much of a revelation, because Valve hired *Defense of the Ancients: Allstars* creator lcefrog last year and we assumed a full *DotA* game was the most likely inevitability to arise from this. We've had a few contenders to the *DotA* throne in recent times (*Demigod*, *Heroes of Newerth*, *League of Legends*), but with all the love and support that Valve pours into any game that bears their logo, a full *DotA* game in their stable might just become the definitive *DotA*-style game.

bt GAMES™ Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 1

Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2	PC, 360, PS3
Front Mission Evolved	PC, 360

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 2

Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	360, PS3, Wii, DS
R.U.S.E.	PC, 360, PS3

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 3

Halo: Reach	360
Valkyria Chronicles 2	PSP
Street Cricket	PS2, PSP
PlayStation Move	PS3
Racket Sports Party	PS3

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 4

Sid Meier's Civilization V	PC
Despicable Me: The Game	PS2, PSP, Wii, DS
Hot Wheels: Battle Force Five	Wii, DS
The Last Airbender	Wii, DS
FIA World Rally Championship	PC, 360, PS3
Darksiders	PC

SEPTEMBER: UNCONFIRMED

The Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole	360, PS3, Wii, DS
F1 2010	PC, 360, PS3
The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest	PS3, PS2, PSP, Wii, DS
Batman: The Brave and the Bold	Wii, DS

Competition Winners

- **June 2010 Dremel competition:**
- Wouter van der Merwe, Middelburg
- **July 2010 Dremel competition:**
- Japie van den Berg, Amanzimtoti
- **June Alan Wake competition:**
1st prize: Bradley Richardson, Somerset West
Runners up: Jan du Preez, Pullenshoek; Dean Sherry, Randpark Ridge
- **July StarCraft II competition**
1st prize: Christo Eksteen, Moorreesburg
Runners up: John Venter, Waverly, Pretoria; Yuri Solomon, Kensington, Cape Town; Jason van Eck, Glen Stantia; Armand Fernhout, Steelpoort; Brandon Welsch, Birchleigh

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Competition Runs until 14 September 2010. 1 console Prize Available only. Terms and conditions apply. Refer to www.btgames.co.za for competition rules.

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STAR WARS

The Force Unleashed II

DEVELOPER > LucasArts PUBLISHER > Activision RELEASE DATE > October 2010 WEB > www.lucasarts.com
GENRE > Action PLATFORMS > Xbox 360 | PS3 | DS | Wii

Uncertain, your future is. Find yourself... you must.

NAG WAS SENT TO the land of Burger King (London... it's a long story) for a presentation, interview and hands-on session with *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II*. In the room we had a life-sized model of C-3PO, a replica Imperial blaster and an angry Chewbacca bust to lend an air of credibility to the proceedings.

Scene-setting aside, most serious *Star Wars* fans have had limited experience with the Force. The two-fingered motioning for sliding doors to open at the local BP 24-hour snack shop and summoning water from the faucets in the bathroom at the airport is about the length and breadth of it. Admittedly the real reason none of us will ever become a Jedi is because we'd be down at the local casino in a flash, playing roulette and using Jedi mind trick to 'encourage' girls. So, what we do instead is live our off-world fantasies out in other mediums such as books, movies, comics and games – games like *The Force Unleashed*.

The original has now spawned a sequel, and based on what we've played and seen, whatever you thought of the first one you can forget for the second. It's even been billed as the *Star Wars* gaming equivalent or parallel (depending on which press release you read) of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Now let's go boldly and see what it's all about.

A PLOT THICKENS

For the purposes of sanity we'll assume all players here chose the recognised canonical ending to the first game, i.e. Ignoring Darth

Vader and taking on the emperor and dying in the end, thereby giving birth to the rebel alliance*. So, Galen Marek aka Starkiller aka Darth Vader's secret apprentice dies in the first game at the hands of the emperor. This is important because...

[Start of text crawl – imagine the Star Wars anthem here]

In *The Force Unleashed II* we once again take control of Starkiller. The writers have chosen cloning on Kamino to 'revive' Vader's secret apprentice. This, of course, has caused something of a stir across more than a few forums and has even resulted in a few people thoughtfully stroking their beards (even in the game world) while considering the possibility of being able to clone a Jedi. It just can't be done see, because of those pesky Midi-chlorians which in turn also caused a bit of a stir when they were revealed in *Episode I*. But we will rise above it all and pretend that none of it matters and we're just here to play a game. Oh, and have fun. The smart bets are on the thinking that Starkiller never actually died in the first game and somehow has just had his memory wiped.

Either way, after escaping an execution on Kamino and making off in Vader's TIE fighter, Starkiller heads for Cato Neimoidia to rescue General Kota (who has been captured by the empire and held at the mercy of Baron Tarko and is scheduled to fight to the death in a series of arena-based gladiatorial battles). Phew! While all this is happening, Starkiller





"The story is all about revenge and redemption, self-discovery and tearing halfway across the galaxy after a girl. So, business as usual then in the *Star Wars* universe..."

has visions from his 'past' of Juno Eclipse, General Kota and Vader's betrayal. But that's not all. While all that is happening, Vader hires Boba Fett to track down Juno Eclipse with instructions to intercept Starkiller when he eventually finds her and kill him. Now, in between all this Starkiller pays a visit to Yoda on Dagobah and enters the same cave Luke entered (or rather, will enter) to face his inner demons. It's certainly very intriguing and easy to see how parallels to *The Empire Strikes Back* have been drawn. Anyway, back to Cato Neimoidia. Starkiller manages to rescue Kota, but not before facing one of the game's insane boss encounters, in this case, the Gorog. This beast uses Star Destroyers for toothpicks (well almost) in a multilevel running battle that feels a little like *God of War*, just with lightsabers. Finally escaping and out of danger, Starkiller must choose between following his heart and finding Juno Eclipse (his love interest and strongest link to his murky past) or joining Kota in rallying the rebel alliance.

[End of text crawl – the camera spirals away and points at a patch of space... a Star Destroyer lurks.]

The story is all about revenge and redemption, self-discovery and tearing

halfway across the galaxy after a girl. So, business as usual then in the *Star Wars* universe. Needless to say if you enjoyed the original game's story and love *Star Wars* you simply cannot miss this one. It's essentially *Star Wars 3.7* – just before *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* and promises more than a few startling revelations and surprises, and considering it's official *Star Wars* canon there really isn't anything more to say on the topic.

A GAME IMPROVES

As for the rest, it's a pretty straightforward equation – more of the same, but better with less rubbish bits. The game plays exactly how you remember the original, same buttons, combinations and the overall feel is on the money. Prepare to be surprised, however, by how sharp and clean *TFUII* looks now with some snappy lighting and weather effects as well as realistic-looking clothing, environments and generic *Star Wars* grit and grime. Another big improvement is a quick and responsive menu screen without any painful loading – this was a major issue in the original game and made popping in to tweak your lightsaber or 'earn' new attack combinations a chore. What you'll discover overall is that the sequel is polished and slick, largely because the team is now used to the technology and isn't struggling just to get it

"Prepare to be surprised, however, by how sharp and clean *TFUII* looks now with some snappy lighting and weather effects as well as realistic-looking clothing, environments and generic *Star Wars* grit and grime."

working this time around.

As you might have noticed from the cover and various screens, Starkiller is now carrying two lightsabers in his trademark grip – twice the slicing and dicing which is convenient because the game now supports limb dismemberment (a widely requested feature by fans). Besides this addition players can use mind trick and Force Fury, but more on these later.

A BIT OF GRIP, PUSH AND LIGHTNING

The hands-on play session at the London venue was essentially the entire escape sequence from Kamino (presumably the first level of the game). It begins with Starkiller free falling after bravely leaping out a window as part of the escape video sequence. While free-falling we had to move left and right while Force Pushing holes in the glass dividers to pass through safely. Tie-fighters went down to our Force Lightning and other

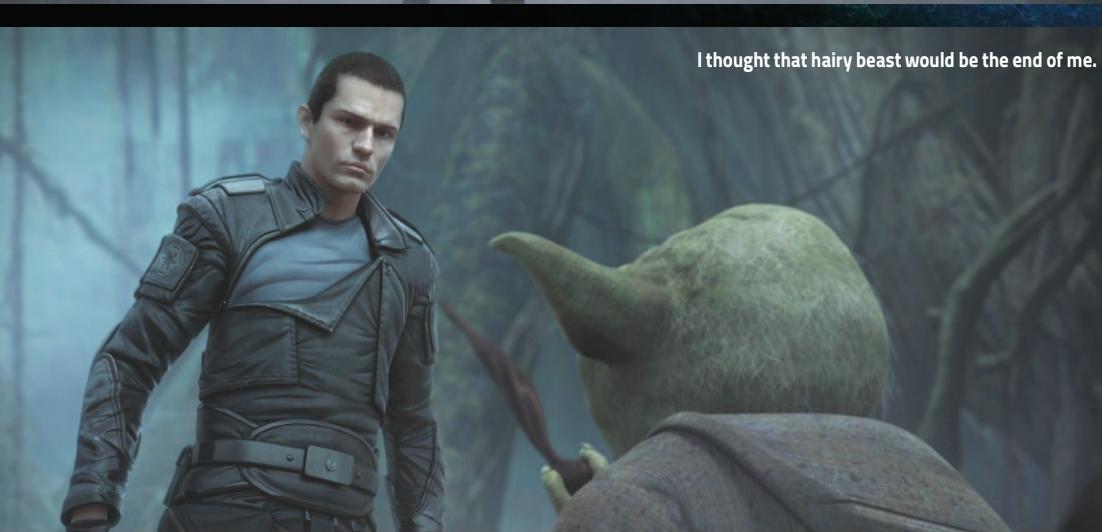
things crashed into exploding things – it was hard to keep track of it all, and suddenly it was over. For the point hunters, the game keeps track of all your destruction while playing, so let rip whenever you see a mouse droid or museum display.

So, after the extreme escape we were suddenly behind a lone Stormtrooper on patrol in a corridor. Using Jedi Mind Trick on him, he scratched his head and simply leapt over the edge of the building to his death. The Mind Trick Force power is contextual and if there's no convenient ledge or cliff nearby, enemies will either attack each other or find other ways to save you a lightsaber swish. It's all rather amusing.

Next up was a running blaster-versus-lightsaber battle against Stormtroopers and other enemy types, which included a large robot that can temporarily freeze you with carbonite while blocking your attacks with a lightsaber-resistant shield



There's an awful lot of moisture in here.



I thought that hairy beast would be the end of me.

The Force Unleashed... the dark side.

Not that gaming journalists and critics, Joe public gamers or anyone really cared, but the development of the original game was a nightmare of imperial proportions. Considering all the challenges, the fact that it shipped at all is a miracle.

The team that made the game was a brand new studio of ten people. They had to build a new team, a new game engine and tool-set and integrate three different technologies (two not previously released) into one dynamic solution. They didn't have an Xbox development kit when they started and the PS3 hadn't even been released yet. Regardless, the game went on to sell over 7 million copies worldwide, and, according to www.wikipedia.com, "The Force Unleashed" was both the fastest-selling *Star Wars* game and LucasArts' fastest-selling game. *The Force Unleashed* won a Writers Guild of America award for Best Video Game Writing.

However, the game didn't blow everyone away and wasn't well-received critically and scored an average of 73 (Xbox 360) and 71 (PS3) on www.metacritic.com. Regardless, it's still one of the better *Star Wars* games in recent memory, and if you want the gaps filled in 'officially' before the start of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* then you just have to play it.



»

Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope is the only *Star Wars* movie to be nominated for the Best Picture Academy Award.

»

There is some uncertainty as to the precise number of toes that Yoda actually has (at least canonically), as the depiction of this anatomical feature is inconsistent between different films, alternately numbering three, four and even five toes.

-tough and a far cry from the simple slicing and dicing in the original. The developers had around 100 enemy types in the first game, but considering they were so similar and tended to blend together they've now opted for fewer overall, but with more variety and individuality.

Another area that has been improved is enemy AI. Instead of simply lining up to die, various enemy types will now work together, forcing the player to use a little more strategy to prevail. Remember that robot with the shield, well now you'll have to use Force Grip to remove the shield while avoiding the freezing carbonite before attacking. There are enemy types that can block lightsabers, so you'll need to deal with them first before you can have fun with the rank and file stormtroopers.

After mopping up the last few bad guys with overly elaborate combination attacks, we had to use the Force to raise platforms to access the higher areas of the level. This type of basic puzzle challenge was seen in the original game but will now be put to better use. The developers have promised more use of Force powers to navigate levels and have made them a little more challenging instead of just a trite novelty. To this end, the fussy targeting system has also been overhauled and is now more intuitive.

Drawing closer to Vader's ship things started heating up and the final new ability came into play - Force Fury. This is a slow recharging ability that powers up everything,

making you almost invincible for a short period. Using this we quickly disposed of two AT-ST walkers and a heap of stormtroopers - almost in a single Force Push blast. Naturally this ability must be used carefully as it doesn't power up quickly. Flying off in Vader's ship ended the play session.

Before we left the console we were able to have a stab at something new for *TFUII* - one of the challenge levels. The one we played involved timed jumping from platforms and back again to beat a 'fastest time' (set by the level creator we were told). These challenge times will then be posted online for your friends to beat. There will apparently be more than a few of these challenges and should extend the life of the game a little.

A WRAP UP

It's difficult to remain calm about this game for many obvious reasons. Less obvious however, and the one thing that stood out the most, was the passion and excitement emanating from the guys putting the game together. They're really just like us, want the same things from their games and have a tremendous amount of respect for the *Star Wars* universe. This passion shows in everything they do. If what was played during the hands-on session was just scratching the surface, then gamers are going to start taking *Star Wars* games seriously again. Keep an eye out for the demo around a month before the game goes on sale for a little taste of what to expect.

Michael James

Q&A

CAMERON SUEY, LUCASARTS, PRODUCER

AFTER A JUICY BURGER King XL Bacon Cheese Burger with extra onion rings, we sat down for an interview with *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II* producer, Cameron Suey. After repeated attempts, he somehow managed to resist our IT-O mind probe but, in the end, he was no match for our imperial 'anal probe*'. Here be the beans, he split.

> **What's the relationship like between you guys and Pixelux (DMM) and NaturalMotion (Euphoria)?**

Very close, when we were developing the original *The Force Unleashed*, Pixelux was in our building with us so that relationship was incredible. I still keep in touch with most of the engineers – they're great guys. NaturalMotion also had a big presence in the building when we were making the original – there were several guys there at all times. So, as a result both those technologies have advanced based on our feedback and interaction with them. So, that has definitely continued in the second game. The Pixelux guys aren't on site anymore but we actually have former LucasArts employees working for Pixelux and vice versa – there's a lot of bleed over between those two and we have them come out and help us out all the time. The NaturalMotion guys also have a guy that comes out and sits with us for a couple of weeks at a time and works with us. We're using the next versions of those technologies (Euphoria and Digital Molecular Matter) so we have a really close working relationship with them.

> **What sort of improvements have been made, besides the LucasArts team having more experience with the technology. The first game was made when those technologies were new and everything seemed 'seat of the pants' and thrown together back then. How has that changed?**

It's like when you have a launch game on a new console. When you compare the launch games to the games five years later there's no comparison. You have the same technology but you've learned so much and it's not so much the technological advances as it's also the design knowledge. We knew how cool DMM and Euphoria was in the first game, but what we've learned this second time around is how better to utilise it, how to make set-ups that show it off better. We've also done a lot of technical back and forth. Euphoria is an incredible program but at first it wasn't quite designed to simulate the amount of forces we were applying, early on in the original game if you Force Pushed a guy, the stress on their body was so great that their body would separate and stretch apart and it was very creepy and bizarre. Obviously, a bug we had to deal with in utilising that, but it's mostly the way we've learnt to put it out front and centre to build set-ups that better show it off. So, while the technologies have definitely improved, our knowledge of how to use them is really what has increased.

> **Have you ever had a situation where**

you've set up a scene in a level and done something that has gummed up the system and crashed the Xbox due to a 'physics' overload?

[Laughs] That's something we do with startling regularity. We shoot for the moon, or rather shoot for the stars and then end up pulling it back to the moon. There are some incredible set pieces you'll see later on in *The Force Unleashed II* that are amazing now but what we planned to do with them originally was just something short of insane.

> **So the planet made of glass didn't work out?**

Yeah, in fact I'd be lying if I said that never came up as an idea. We learnt how to better utilise it within the restrictions of the hardware itself. But we've definitely overloaded that system many a time. [Good to know, Ed]

> **What would you say is the toughest part of this game – putting it out there?**

There are a couple of things for me. The story of the original game was so well received that it's nothing short of daunting trying to follow that up. I think Haden Blackman – the lead writer on the game was very wise in taking some cues from *The Empire Strikes Back*, making it a darker, more personal story – about that personal decision, whether to go with Kota to help the rebellion or whether to continue on searching for Juno Eclipse. I think there are a lot of parallels between that and *The Empire Strikes Back*, obviously with Luke training with Yoda and leaving his training early to go and save his friends in that vision. That's definitely one of the scariest things for me. There are other technical issues in that we knew there was a lot we did very well in the original *TFU* and we knew we had to keep doing them well but there are some things we didn't quite do so well and we wanted to really improve on. So the most difficult thing for me was making sure that those things we needed to improve on really got up to the levels we wanted them to. We have a really fantastic project lead with Julio Torres who is very savvy with his philosophy of doing less better – so what we did was pick a couple of areas, very specific things and let's make those as good as we can possibly do, instead of spreading ourselves too thin, let's focus on these key pillars. I think that really paid off in the end.

> **Considering this is official *Star Wars* canon, I guess you have to be careful with everything you say and do. There must be far too much pressure all the time?**

There's a lot of pressure involved, and it's one of those things that's a double-edged sword. On one hand we're all obviously huge *Star Wars* fans, and the chance to tell stories in this universe is incredible, but the amount of respect and knowledge people have for this universe is staggering. It's difficult to please everyone, but we want to make sure we create a game and a story that is consistent



SNA [Some New Acronyms]

Now listen up. You're going to be assaulted by a few new acronyms and technical mumbo jumbo during the interview on these pages. This is a brief guide so we can have less head scratching and more enlightenment.

Ready? Deep breath... The development team built a proprietary game engine for the original *Force Unleashed* and called it the Ronin Engine. *The Force Unleashed II* is built on Ronin 2.0. From what we can determine (see *The Force Unleashed...* the dark side) the original Ronin engine was an amalgamated conglomeration held together by silent prayers and a dollop of wood glue. It was the platform that incorporated DMM or Digital Molecular Matter (by Pixelux Entertainment), Havok Physics (by Havok) and Euphoria (by NaturalMotion) into one single game experience. Here's what they all do:

Havok is a third-party physics engine that 'allows for real-time collision and dynamics of rigid bodies in three dimensions' – in other words when bits of the game world hit other bits, all the bits behave in a manner that corresponds to 'real-world physics'.

Euphoria is essentially an 'automatic' animation system that simulates the way a body reacts to environmental conditions – such as being hit by a train results in flailing arms and legs. Ironically, the engine is tweaked so that bodies react more like stuntmen do in movies, and this is because the game-playing public's idea of what looks 'realistic' is really based on Hollywood movies. Snap.

DMM is an 'accurate' simulation of physical objects and how they react to applied forces. For example, glass and wood have different properties and react differently when an object is thrown against them. DMM simulates these properties and makes it possible to create a planet covered in rubbery mushrooms that bend and sway in a realistic fashion when the player interacts with them.

This is the technology nutshell. Wikipedia is the place to go if you want more detailed information on these technologies.



"Instead of simply lining up to die, various enemy types will now work together, forcing the player to use a little more strategy to prevail."

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Lucas got the idea for Chewbacca one morning in the early '70s while watching his wife, Marcia, drive off in her car. She had their Alaskan malamute, Indiana, (the name sake for Indiana Jones) with her. Lucas liked the way the large shaggy dog looked in the passenger seat, so he decided to create a character in the film that was a cross between Indiana, a bear and a monkey.

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*David Prowse, a weightlifter from Bristol, played the role of Darth Vader on screen but the voice was that of James Earl Jones. Knowing that his voice wouldn't be used in the movies, Prowse claimed he would sometimes deliver joke versions of his lines in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. However, when Darth Vader's face is finally revealed at the end of *Jedi*, he's portrayed by actor Sebastian Shaw.*

You've got something jammed in here real good.



"It's difficult to remain calm about this game for many obvious reasons. Less obvious however, and the one thing that stood out the most, was the passion and excitement emanating from the guys putting the game together."

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Boba Fett's dialogue in *The Empire Strikes Back*, consists of only twenty-seven words: 'As you wish,' 'He's no good to me dead', 'What if he doesn't survive? He's worth a lot to me', and 'Put Captain Solo in the cargo hold.' In *Return of the Jedi*, he says two more – 'What the?' – just before his jetpack malfunctions. The total increases to 30 if his inarticulate scream in *Return of the Jedi* is counted.

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In early drafts of the *A New Hope* screenplay, the main character who became Luke was a girl named Starkiller. In other drafts, Luke was an experienced 65-year-old General rather than a youth. Just before the final script was written, his surname was Starkiller, and only later was it changed to Skywalker after executives at 20th Century Fox expressed their displeasure at the name.





within the world, so we worked very closely with Lucas Licensing, which is George's right arm, in keeping the continuity and consistency of the *Star Wars* universal. One of the questions I get over and over again – is it hard working within those strictures? and it's actually, most of the time, more creatively empowering because we'll say, look, we're interested in doing something like this and they'll say okay here's where something similar has been done and here's where the precedence for that is, here's some cool ideas for things you could explore. So, a lot of the time there's a lot of creative feedback between us and them and we've come up with some really incredible stuff that we wouldn't have been able to without their support. We'll often come to them with fully formed ideas and say we want to do this, and they'll say that's good but change this to this and this to this and then it matches within the greater thing. The thing about *Star Wars* is that there's 5,000 years of history and a galaxy full of planets, so there's an almost infinite amount of possibilities. You want to do something, they're going to help you find a way to do it, and it's fantastic.

> Was there anything you really wanted to do but couldn't do – stuff left on the cutting-room floor?

Yeah, so any time you make a game, for any ten ideas that get implemented there are a hundred really good ideas that don't. That's just the nature of the way you work, you brainstorm some incredible ideas and you go with the ones that work the best. We've had many good ideas that just weren't right for *TFU*. So we try and save those ideas to use them later. We thought about all sorts of incredible stuff the first time around. I would have loved to see more vehicle combat or more grand-scale battles, but those really aren't right for this game. *TFU* is really about being a Jedi and being the most powerful Jedi, again that's one of those great things about *Star Wars* is that because it's such a wide world there are so many infinite possibilities for ideas like that.

> Seeing that you guys are all gamers, do you pull in ideas from the games you love, or do you look more towards what's more commercially viable? How do you balance all the things that work with the things you love and enjoy personally?

Very, very carefully. The strange thing is the more I work on games the less time I get to play them. But with any commercial enterprise that's artistic there is that pull from both directions. There is what's commercially viable versus what has artistically spoken to us. There are some

influences that are pretty strange – I really think that a lot of the difficulty and the very skilled-based stuff in *Demon's Souls* probably influenced our challenges.

> Did you guys ever discuss co-operative and multiplayer and what came out of that thinking?

Like I said, out of the ten ideas there are a hundred good ones. We definitely thought about those. Again, we really wanted to play towards the central core strengths of *TFU* and as ambitious and neat as any of those things might have been we really felt that being that singular empowered Jedi was what really resonated about *TFU*. That's not to say that those ideas aren't going to be awesome in future *Star Wars* games. So, it's definitely something we talked about but we wanted to focus on those core elements of the single-player experience. It's not unheard of for multiplayer to be tacked onto a game that doesn't quite live up to the main game and as good as the main game was you have to wonder if they had of spent that energy into just keeping that single-player story what more they could have accomplished.

> In real life, who would you freeze in Carbonite?

[Laughs] Gosh, I've got to think about that. There are certain people I'd want around all the time. Can I unfreeze them and freeze them again?

> Sure!

There are two engineers that sit next to me at my job, who are like my Statler and Waldorf [Muppets – look it up, Ed], they're always yelling at me and making fun of me. I want to carry those guys around with me always, unfreeze them and have them give commentary on anything I'm saying at all times.

> Besides the lightsaber (obviously) which toy would you like to pluck out of the *Star Wars* universe for yourself in this one?

Ah, you have to cut the lightsaber out of course, it's the coolest weapon ever invented. I'm going to be really nerdy here. I've always loved starfighters and space-flight simulators and I think the B-Wing is just about the coolest ship that's ever been seen on-screen. It's just a dynamic and compelling shape that looks nothing like any other starfighter I've seen. I would love to have a B-Wing.

> Thanks for your time! NAG



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Dead Rising 2 is set five years after the events of the first game. Since that's a fair bit of time to cover with back-story and cut scenes, Capcom has elected to release the standalone DLC, *Case Zero*, as a combined primer and demo for the title. *Case Zero* should be available on the 3rd of September, and is to be released exclusively on Xbox LIVE Arcade at a cost of 400 Microsoft Points.



Dead Rising 2



Three words: Chainsaws. On. Motorbikes.

GENRE > Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

IF YOU HAVE ANY sort of brain capacity, you should remember that two months ago we did rather a big thing about *Dead Rising*. The game is due for release soon, but in the meanwhile, we managed to get our hands on some preview code so we could share our experiences with you. Now, I'm not going to bother discussing the story, because it's already been covered (and, truthfully, because the "how" when it comes to slaughtering hordes of zombies is much more interesting than the "why"), so let's have a look at exactly what you can expect to get out of *Dead Rising 2* when it lands this October. [And this is how you turn a three page preview into a two page preview. Ed]

Right from the beginning, it's clear that *DR2* is very similar to its predecessor. Chuck moves and behaves in an almost identical manner to Frank West, and for the most part, you'll be performing the same tricks that Frank had up his sleeve – all of which tend to focus on finding obscure and interesting ways to kill zombies while doing your darnedest to avoid your own death. *Dead Rising 2* is a larger game with more for the player to do, and fixes up some of the issues that people had with the first title (most importantly the save system; as well as possessing a stronger and better-presented storyline), but you'll be pleased to know that the first game's sandbox approach to zombie chaos is very much intact.

As much fun as mindlessly slaying the undead may be, *Dead Rising 2* offers a few distractions to keep you busy for the three days of game time while you wait for the



military to arrive. The concept of case files makes a return, and once again it's up to the player to explore or ignore those cases as much as they desire. In addition, your contact back at the safe house (where your ailing daughter is waiting for her daily shot of Zombrex) will contact you with nearby side-quests that usually involve meeting up with and rescuing other survivors – some more capable of self-defence than others. During his conquests, Chuck will earn PP (*Dead Rising*'s equivalent of experience points) for performing various acts, like killing zombies or rescuing fellow survivors from the living corpses' clammy clutches. Earn enough PP and Chuck will gain a level, allowing you to increase his combat



Things to do in Fortune City

- Set alight a zombie with a Tiki Torch.
- Hack a zombie's limbs off with a machete, fire axe or sledge hammer.
- Push around a zombie in a wheelchair.
- Worthlessly flail at a zombie with a handbag.
- Throw a bottle of shampoo at a zombie. It will form a slippery puddle on the floor that results in an entertaining undead balancing act.
- Freeze a zombie with a fire extinguisher (then smash it to pieces).
- Shoot a zombie with a bow and arrow, or impale it with a Native American spear.
- Get drunk and throw up on a zombie.
- Win a car.
- Wear a tuxedo with a fishing hat.



prowess, learn new skills or gain additional health or equipment slots.

Perhaps the most interesting addition in *Dead Rising 2* is the ability to combine items from within the maintenance rooms throughout Fortune City to form new, extremely powerful weapons. Not only do these toys give you creative ways to dispense justice, but they increase the amount of PP gained from each zombie dispatched. Combined weapons vary from simple items like Molotov cocktails (made from newspaper and a bottle of whiskey) to exotic tools of destruction like the wheelchair/lawnmower combination (use your imagination) or the drill bucket (a group of drills penetrate a bucket, which is then deposited onto the head of a nearby zombie so that the plethora of power tools can get to work). Not all items have the potential to be combined, but from what we've seen about half of them do; you'll know they have potential for combos if there's a wrench icon next to their name.

As is the case with most good tales of a world sucked into zombie apocalypse, it's the people in Fortune City that really bring the story to life (pun more-or-less intended). There are a number of survivors scattered throughout the game world, but also those less desirable characters that seek to gain from this whole miserable experience. The toughest of them are the psychopaths, another returning idea from *Dead Rising*, who act as bosses within the game and require as much brains as combat ability

to bring down. Then there are the looters – gangs of hooded hoodlums out to make a quick buck. This is where a new resource comes into play – cash. Chuck will earn money from a variety of sources (this is a gambling city, so that should give you a few ideas) and can spend his hard-earned/won/stolen cash to purchase various items from looter-run pawnshops around the city. The items for sale tend towards pre-constructed weapon combinations (the purchase of which automatically unlocks the recipe card for the item) and the all-important Zombrex. This wonder-drug is pricey, however, so it's in Chuck's best interest to seek less expensive means of acquisition, but when the clock starts ticking closer to deadline, it might be a good idea to just fork over the money and worry about finding fancy toys to play with later.

Dead Rising 2 is perhaps one of the most anticipated arcade/action titles of the year. The first game brought with it a sense of care-free frolicking in the overrun Willamette mall, but danger lurked around every corner, and *DR2* seems to be on the right track to create a repeat performance. The sandbox elements are back in *Dead Rising 2*, as are the story elements (although stronger now), as is the action and the intrigue and the crazy fun. So, really, the best way to describe this title is everything that you like about the first game, plus more. If that's what you've been expecting, then now's a good time to begin the rejoicing. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Pictured: not zombies



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One of the criticisms levelled at the first game involved its lack of online cooperative play for the campaign, instead offering only offline play if you wanted to engage in some cooperative crime. The sequel will address this issue with its online co-op.



Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days

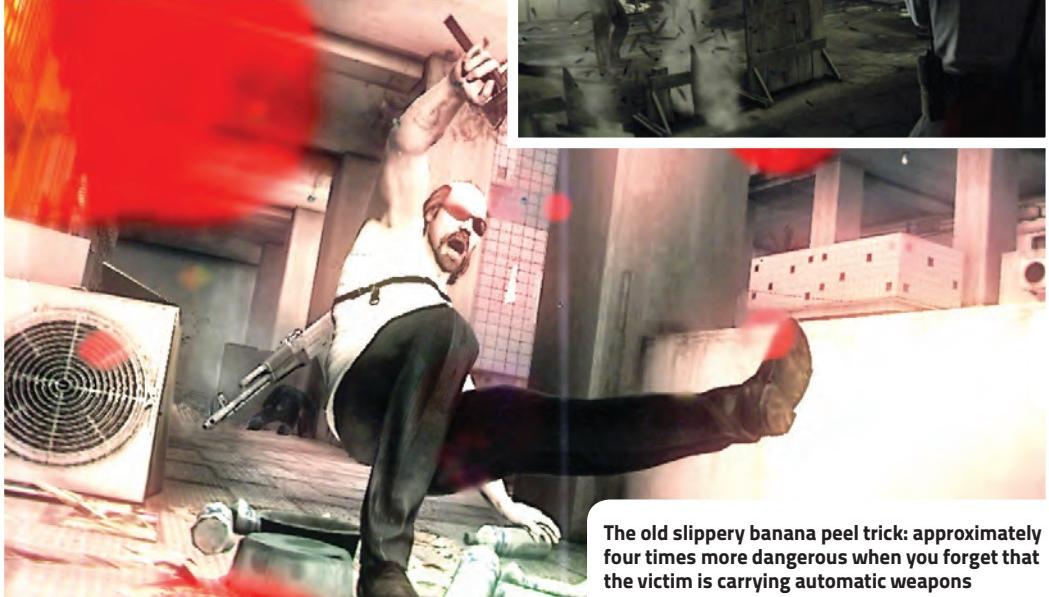
I say what I mean, and I do what I say

GENRE > Third-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

WHEN KANE & LYNCH: *Dead Men* was released back in 2007, it was only really known for three things: its mixed reviews, its cool story and its alleged involvement in the firing of former GameSpot editor Jeff Gerstmann. That's not much to go on, and in a year like 2007, which overflowed with releases of awesome, critically acclaimed games like *BioShock*, *Crysis*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Mass Effect*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* and *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (all of which released in November 2007, as did *Dead Men*), the last thing you want is for your game to get mixed reviews. That's what happened though, and *Dead Men* sort of just disappeared under the immense weight of all the bigger, better games hitting shelves all around it. With *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days*, IO Interactive hopes to give the titular duo of Kane and Lynch their dues by earning them some respect from gamers everywhere.

Dog Days is set in Shanghai, China, where self-medicated psychopath Lynch has set up his crime-filled shop and quickly wormed his way into becoming a part of Shanghai's criminal underworld. He's got a big arms deal in the works that'll have him swimming in more money than he'd ever dreamed of swimming in if he manages to pull it off. So he gives his old ex-mercenary buddy Kane a call to ask him for help in ensuring this deal goes off without a hitch. Hitches become plentiful when the pair set off a series of events that sees the deal bust and leaves them to deal with the consequences. The developers promise a more intense story, making extensive use of the words "raw" and "brutal" to describe the title in press



The old slippery banana peel trick: approximately four times more dangerous when you forget that the victim is carrying automatic weapons

releases. From what we've seen of the story, it's looking good so far with all its twists and unpredictable events.

Playing *Dog Days* is difficult to describe, because I've never seen a game take such a unique approach to a third-person camera before. Basically, the developers have drawn inspiration from YouTube videos, amateur cinematography and documentary filmmaking (together with the work of legendary film directors like Michael Mann) to create an experience that feels and looks like you're watching shaky-cam footage from a snuff film. Whether you're directly controlling Lynch (who is now the player character in the game, while Kane





"It's got a gritty, realistic feel to it..."



My back... My back!



takes the role of sidekick – a role reversal compared to the first game) or watching a cut scene (some of which are quite brutal and/or disturbing), you're seeing the action from the perspective of some disembodied cameraman who seems incapable of keeping the camera steady for more than a second at a time. The main characters are acutely aware of the camera, with Kane even shooting wary glances at the camera during cut scenes at the outset of the story. There's no point in hiding it: all this camera shaking and bobbing and weaving does mean that until you get used to this cool new home video-style camerawork, you're going to feel crazy disoriented a lot of the time. Once you've grown accustomed to it, however, chances are you'll see it as we do – a great way to create tension and urgency while making you feel like you're a concrete part of *Dog Days'* look into the criminal underworld. All the post-production editing effects are in there as well. If you kill (or execute) an enemy via headshot, or if there's some awesome nudity, for example, it'll be blurred out with a mosaic censor. Film grain, visual

artefacts, motion blur and visual interference hammer home this intriguing feature even further. Other than all this fancy camera-related stuff, the game plays like any other third-person shooter. Chaotic gunfights, cover systems and constant shouting from Kane, Lynch and everyone else are all on show here, with missions that range from foot chases through Shanghai's crowded back alleys, to one in which you're forced to prevent a limo from being destroyed as it makes its way through an ambush.

It may play like a typical third-person shooter, but it's the story, unique feel and interesting multiplayer modes that'll set this apart from the pack. The new visual style and the more serious approach to the narrative makes this game feel like a much more mature crime story than we're used to seeing in games of this nature. Everything is dirty, violent and actually a bit disturbing at times. It's got a gritty, realistic feel to it that's backed up by already solid controls and we're interested to see if *Dog Days* can bolster the series' rickety reputation.

NAG
Dane Remendes



Whack-A-Mole

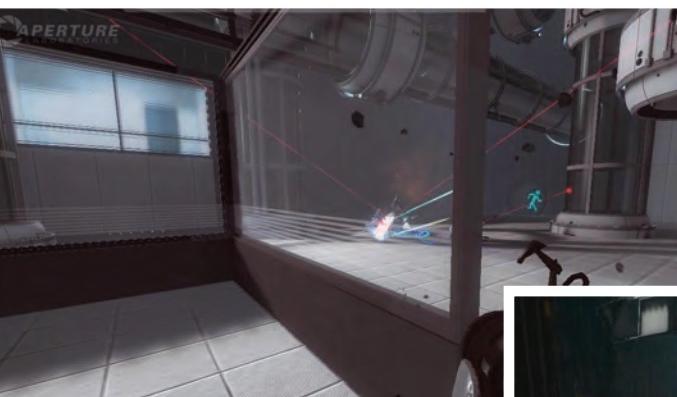
Building on the original game's Fragile Alliance multiplayer mode, *Dog Days* will feature three multiplayer modes that can be played online or via System Link. Cops & Robbers is a fairly simple mode. Players are divided up into two teams of cops and robbers, with the robbers trying to steal a ridiculous amount of money within a four-minute time limit while the coppers try to fill the robbers' nether regions with lead. It's basically a much more violent (or less violent, depending on where you lived as a kid), digital version of that game you probably played in your yard growing up.

Fragile Alliance makes a return for the sequel, with a similar premise to that of Cops & Robbers, except that the robbers are able to strategically betray each other to try and walk away with a bigger share of the loot. See, while you're attempting to escape the fuzz as a robber, it may be in your best interests to off one of your criminal buddies. Should you choose to outright shoot a fellow criminal or simply take them as a human shield, you're labelled as a traitor to everyone on your team, leaving you with cops and former teammates to worry about receiving a fatal bullet from. If you manage to survive your choice to become a traitor and be the last bad guy standing at the end of the round, however, fortune and glory awaits as you earn a higher score and more of the cash.

The third mode, Undercover Cop, is identical to Fragile Alliance except for one difference: there's a mole in the robber's team. One player is chosen to go undercover and work for the cops and it's that player's job to prevent the criminals from escaping. To do this, the mole is able to stealthily kill off robbers and if he isn't seen, he can continue to pick off the robbers one by one until none are left standing, unlike Fragile Alliance which immediately alerts your entire team to your betrayal whether you're spotted or not.

The point of all this betraying and heisting is the reward – at the end of every match, players can use money they've earned to buy cool new toys. The less robbers on your team, the bigger your share and the prettier the guns you can buy.

There's also a single-player Arcade mode which sees you joining forces with AI-controlled teammates to steal as much cash as possible while surviving increasingly difficult rounds.



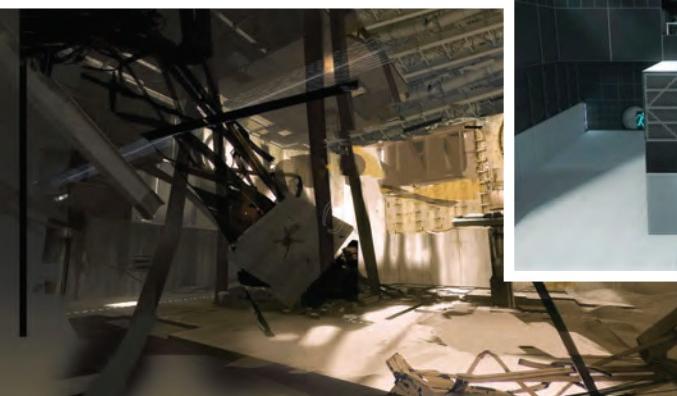
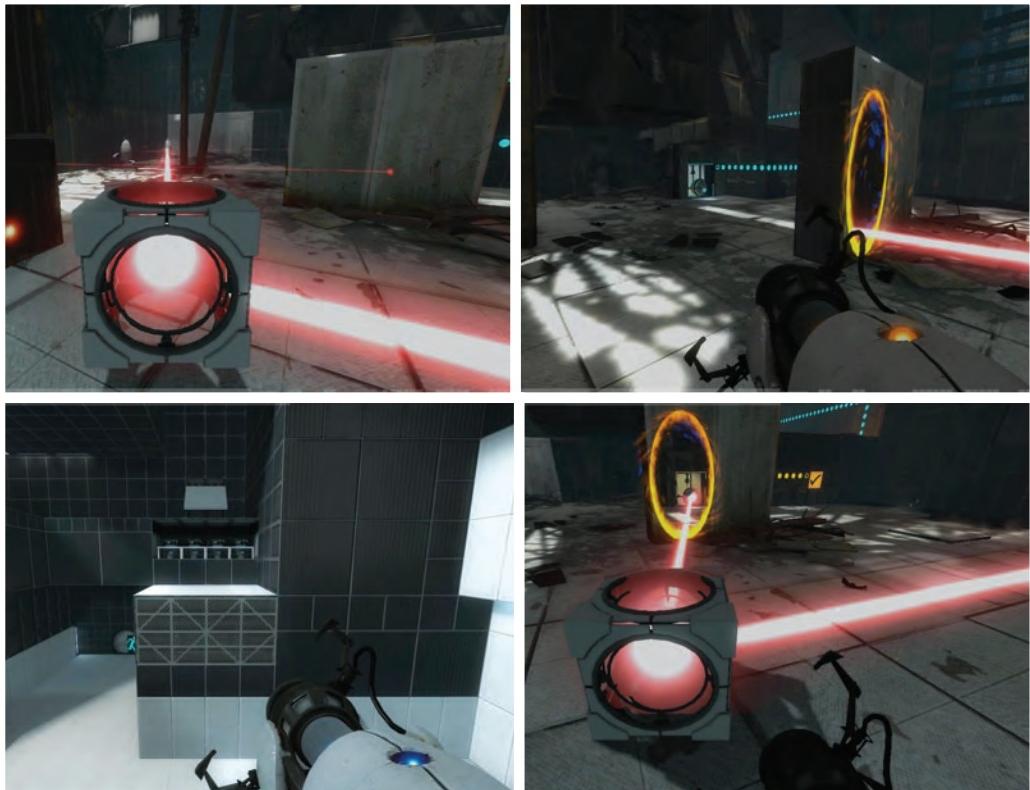
Gabe Newell @ E3 2010

Gabe Newell, co-founder and managing director of videogame development and digital distribution company Valve, walks on stage. "I've said a lot of nasty things about the PlayStation 3," he says. To recap, in 2007 he said: "I don't think they spent nearly enough time talking to developers when they were developing the PS3."

Yeah, that's pretty nasty. Vile stuff. Gabe appeared at the Sony Conference at E3, to spill the beans: *Portal 2* would be on PS3, and would be integrated with Steam. That means speedier auto-updates, community features and DLC at the same price as the PC version. Valve plans to eventually even have cross-platform co-op.

Double The Fun

Local split-screen and online cooperative puzzle solving! Progressing through a special campaign, two players can team up (each with their own set of portals) to make their way through difficult puzzle chambers. Playing online, you'll even be able to temporarily enter a split-screen view to help coordinate, and drop icons in the level to help identify things that need to be done. In co-op, you'll play as two cute robotic characters: a modified turret gun and a personality core.



Portal 2

I think we can put our differences behind us. For science. You monster.

GENRE > First-person puzzle

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

PUZZLE-SOLVING AND EXPLORATION *Portal* took center stage, while the narrative surreptitiously lurked in between the cracks of geometry and dialogue. Hidden in nooks, wall-scribbles and photos. Tidbits of information that, when combined with cues from the insane artificial intelligence GLaDOS's maniacal ramblings, hinted at a greater fiction that tied into the *Half Life* universe. With *Portal 2*, much of that subtle narrative style seems to give way to a more direct approach. Early demonstrations show a chatty personality module muttering away like a secondary character.

Beyond that, it's *Portal* with new inventions. Excursion Funnels, spiralling anti-gravity beams that slowly push away anything caught in the beam. Pneumatic Diversity Vents, that create a suction that can be used to get rid of

anything when combined with some portals. Faith Plates: springboards that send contents flying. Thermal Discouragement Beams: lasers that can be deflected to power switches or burn things.

The most exciting additions are the gels that can be splashed on surfaces, redirected through portals. Orange 'Propulsion Gel' lets you slip past dangers. Blue 'Repulsion Gel' turns any surface into a springboard. Each inventive new element slowly combines into something that looks almost Rube Goldberg-esque, when shown as a complete puzzle to navigate.

With more of everything, including budget and development time, *Portal 2* will have a hard time being anything but an awesome experience. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

DigiPen: Where Valve Gets Their Talent

Portal was made by a team of students from the videogame university, DigiPen, after Valve noticed the team's portal-powered project *Narbacular Drop* and hired them. With *Portal 2*, the physics-

altering paint mechanics come from yet another DigiPen team Valve has snapped up, a group that made a first-person paint-flinging game called *Tag: The Power Of Paint*.



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Originally, Valve didn't think *Portal* would do all that well, which is why they bundled it in the *Orange Box* along with *Team Fortress 2*, and *Half Life 2* plus episodes.





The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Link, he came to town, to save, the Princess Zelda

GENRE > Action Adventure

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS



TIME FOR A NEW *Zelda* game! I'm reminded of what someone in the NAG office told me recently. "Aren't all *Zelda* games just the same game over and over?" Sure, to a degree. That's what makes them a *Zelda*, and not, say, a *Metroid*. Or a *Imagine: Babyz*. The success of the *Zelda* franchise has always relied on Nintendo's ability to craft a compelling adventure out of a classic story and structure, throwing in just enough new spice to make the dish seem interesting again. With *Skyward Sword*, the spice packet is clearly labelled: *Wii Sports Resort*.

If you've messed around with *Wii Sports*

Resort's sword-fighting, bowling and archery, you know exactly how *Skyward Sword's* fighting system works. Using the Motion Plus add-on that snaps on to the bottom of the Wiimote, giving it true 1-to-1 tracking of your motions, you can flail your arm around and Link will look just as foolish as you do. The point of it: monsters require you to slice and chop in specific directions to defeat them. Moblins raise their swords above them or to their sides, blocking incoming chops. Deku Babas open their flapping jaws vertically or horizontally: slash the right way, and they go down in one.



It's a prequel to *Ocarina of Time*! Miktar didn't care much for *Ocarina of Time*. Or *Twilight Princess*. He's a Link To The Past kind of guy.

There is a door with an eye that you have to make dizzy by moving your sword in a circle, and the eye falls off. The Nunchuck lets you shield bash back incoming projectiles. Your bow involves precise aiming, and you can roll bombs as if they're bowling balls.

Visually, *Skyward Sword* strikes a balance between *Twilight Princess'* aesthetic, told through *Wind Waker's* palette and bold design. Little else is known. Our hands-on time with the E3 demo showed a competent and rather compelling combat and control scheme, but not much else. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Valid from Thursday 26 August to Friday 10 September 2010.

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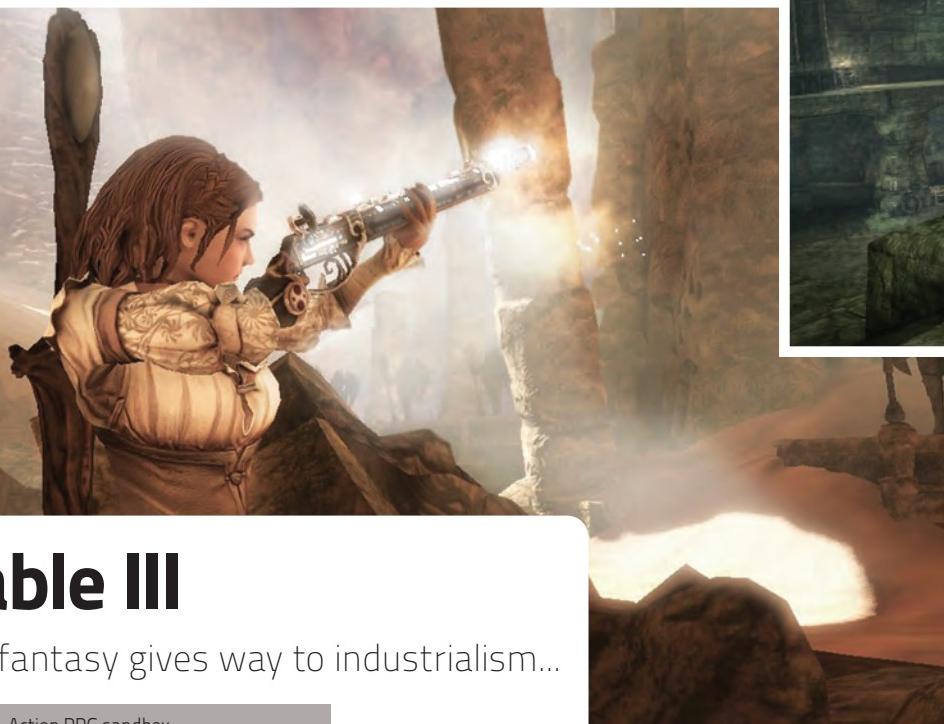
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Musket posing 101: Musket - check, Blue Steel pose - Check. And pose



Story Spoiler Alert

Fable III takes place 60 years after the second game. The next bit is a story spoiler for *Fable II*, so don't read it if you still want to finish it. At the end of *Fable II* you, the hero of Albion, save the land from the horrible badness of The Spire. Your guiding grandma, Teresa, says "thanks lol, now get out" and takes The Spire for herself. The situation remains unresolved. You get crowned as the ruler of Albion, then die of old age. In *Fable III*, you play as one of your children, disinherited in favour of your brother who's a total meanie. The goal: to overthrow your brother by gaining enough followers.



Fable III

The fantasy gives way to industrialism...

GENRE > Action RPG sandbox

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

CHOICES OF A GOOD nature, like not kicking the puppy, means you grow a halo. Kick the puppy, and your choice of a bad nature (since the puppy didn't deserve it), means you grow horns.

Fundamentally, the "morality" in the *Fable* series, much like Lionhead's other moral-centric experience *Black & White*, has been something of a whitewash. Cool, for sure, but mostly just aesthetic. "I think it should be so much more sophisticated than 'Do I want to be a psychotic killer or do I want to be Mother Teresa?' That's what most moral choices come down to," says Peter Molyneux, who seems to have forgotten that it was *his* designs for the *Fable* series that made the morality choices so unsophisticated. But, with *Fable III*, he seems set on trying to give a little more finesse to the idea.

An example: you could save the kids from working in the factory, but that would halt Bowerstone's economy, setting off a cascade of issues you'd

have to deal with. Ultimately you need to gain followers (the new form of "experience" used to unlock abilities), and everything you do grants or removes followers. The more followers you have, the more powerful you become. Marry into a rich family, lots of followers. Run successful businesses, even more followers. The social elements now mean something beyond being curiosities. No more stat points either: use a weapon a lot, and your skill with that weapon improves. Use it for good, it glows and sings, use it for bad, it starts to become demonic.

Magic has been revamped, so that you wear gauntlets to get magical effects. Wear Shock and Force Push gauntlets together, their effects combine into an electric blast. How all this will combine with Lionhead's promise of a compelling narrative on the rise (or fall) of a king, should be something to see. **NAG**
Miktar Dracorn

Co-op Overhaul

Fable II had co-op, but it was a giant mess. Both local and online play was stifling and limited, and pretty much useless. *Fable III* aims to fix all that.

You'll no longer share a single camera during co-op play, claims Lionhead. "And you play as your hero, even if you join another person's game," says Louise Murray, the Head of the *Fable* franchise. "You can form business relationships with other players, or even get married and have children."





>>

Killzone 3 will support the PlayStation Move, so you can point and shoot by literally pointing and shooting, if you're holding a Move wonder-wand.

Killzone 3

Now with thrice the zone killing

GENRE > First-person tactical shooter

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

EMPEROR SCALAR VISARI IS dead.

Instead of his demise signalling the end of the Helghast uprising, it fuels a renewed effort against the pacifying forces of the ISA. At this rate, the war might never end. But at least now there's a snow and ice level, a fine addition to Killzone 2's cityscape and desert levels.

What little was shown and played at E3 highlighted a few key elements: stereoscopic 3D in a first-person shooter is both interesting and nauseating, futuristic jetpacks are awesome, and developer Guerrilla really knows how to make shooting people feel righteous, yet tense. We first-person shot our way through an early level of the game in the E3 demo, where a group of ISA dropships attempt to raid a Helghast base situated amidst a cluster of decommissioned oil rigs. Looking like the dilapidated industrial setting of Killzone 2, except on struts, above water, and covered with snow and ice, the visuals are as crisp and solid as we've come to expect from Guerrilla. The scene opens with some on-rails machinegun-turret action, hitting key parts of the environment to make large metal beams and girders collapse into the ocean. Helghast soldiers explode into meaty chunks. With our 3D glasses on, those meaty chunks are totally in 3D.

On the ground, it's back to the traditional first-person-shooting stuff. The combat feels like a cross between Killzone 2's slow and methodical pop-and-shoot, but with a faster edge to it, leaning more towards a conventional shooter feel. The artificial intelligence driving the enemy's actions has



been given a major upgrade: they criss-cross between cover, flanking you effortlessly instead of just popping out from behind a corner to get shot in the face. Or to shoot you in the face, since this is Killzone, one of those rare first-person shooter series where you aren't an invincible 10-foot tall tank enraged on PCP. Kids, don't do drugs. You can stumble into enemies by accident, their reactions ranging from surprise to anger, and then pop them in the face with new close-quarter combat moves. Tap a button when you're close enough, and the camera cuts external into a cinematic viewing of your badass going kung-fu combo all over their stuff and right up in their grill. It's pretty rad.

Putting down the 3D glasses a while before we barf all over the nice couches in the PlayStation demo room, we're promised that there will be plenty of new locations in Killzone 3, like jungles and apparently, a battle in space. There're new toys to play with, like the WASP rocket launcher that basically dumb-fires a swarm of mini-nukes – impractical, yet fun. The jetpack pickup lets you first-person platform jump around, get the drop on enemies or go hide up high to regenerate health. It's a pity they weren't willing to talk about multiplayer yet, since that's an area where Killzone 2 really shined.

NAG

Miktar Dracon

Quick Hits



DEATHSPANK

When *DeathSpank* was announced, it was billed as a combination of action-RPG hack 'n' slash and classic adventure gameplay. That's a tall order, but when you throw the wacky mind of *Monkey Island* co-creator Ron Gilbert into the mix, you're already off to a pretty good start.

As far as storylines go, this one is delightfully simple: *DeathSpank* – Hero of the Downtrodden, Vanquisher of Evil and Defender of Justice – is told in his youth that he needs to retrieve The Artifact. So that's what he does. On your quest, you'll gather new weapons, armour, potions and other magical items, chat to quest-giving NPCs and solve a number of amusing and varied challenges around the world.

Bottom line: *DeathSpank* might not be as complex a hack 'n' slash as *Diablo*, nor as intriguing an adventure game as *Monkey Island*, but for what it is – a happy middle of the road between the two – it accomplishes its goals and adds in a healthy dose of humour along the way.



GRATUITOUS SPACE BATTLES

Epic battles. In space. They're what life is all about really. *Battlestar Galactica*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Stargate Whatever* – cut out all the crazy, chaotic battles with fighters and bombers and frigates and cruisers whizzing about shooting missiles and lasers and space bullets at each other, mash them all together in a giant space-battle montage, and you'll have an idea of what to expect from *Gratuitous Space Battles*. The premise is simple: build and design your ships, kit them out with a bunch of modules, strategically position your fleet, then unleash them against an enemy fleet to see if your designs and positioning hold them off. During the battle you have no control over your units, so all you do is sit back and enjoy the pretty light show and hope your pre-mission planning holds out. You earn a variable amount of Honour with each mission you play. Honour is used to buy new hulls, modules and more. This all makes for an enjoyable, light-hearted game with a surprising amount of tactical depth.

Bottom line: Explosions. In space. With ships. And lasers. And shields. And stuff. Fun times.

Web Scores

How do we measure up? We scour the Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.
NAG // Metacritic average // Game Rankings average

STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY



97
93
93

DEMON'S SOULS



92
89
90

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 11



82
79
81

NAUGHTY BEAR



58
42
44

CRACKDOWN 2



57
71
71

LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4



80
79
80

BLU-RAY

For the Fans

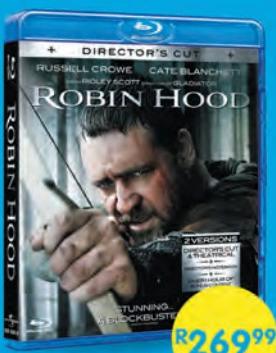


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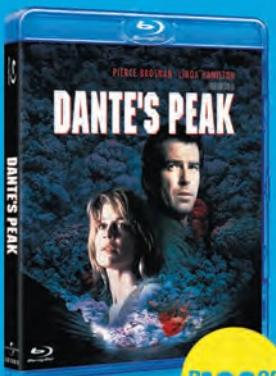
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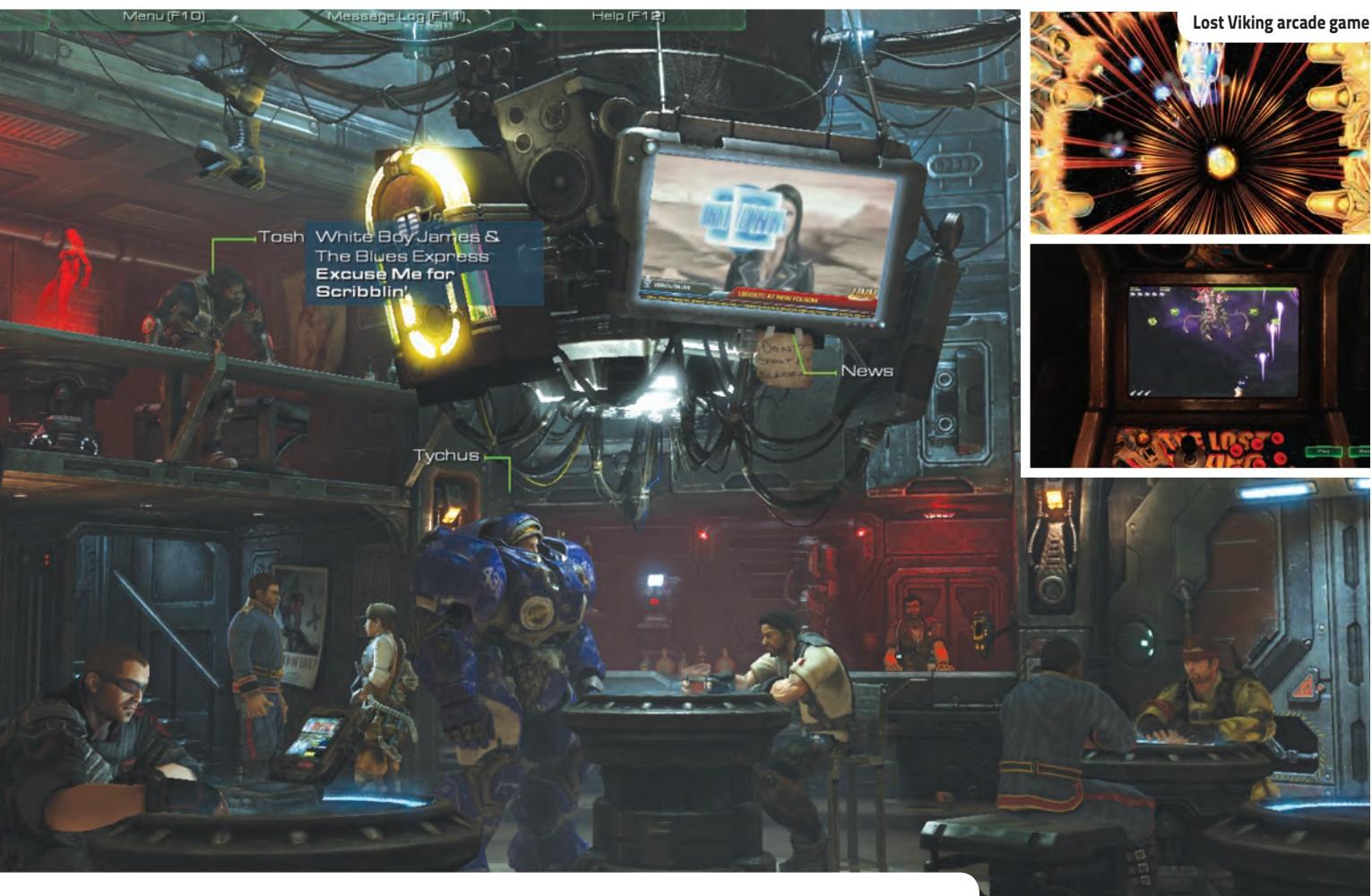
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Look & Listen
For the Fans



StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty

Twelve years distilled into around 1,000 words... No pressure.

GENRE > Real-Time Strategy

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP MAC

FOUR YEARS HAVE PASSED since the Queen of Blades and her overwhelming Zerg forces halted their unrelenting assault on the Koprulu Sector and retreated to the planet Char before vanishing completely, taking with them whatever traces of Sarah Kerrigan's humanity remained. The Zerg threat is gone, but they are not forgotten, with constant reminders existing in the painful memories festering within the minds of veterans of the Brood War. The Protoss have once again taken a passive role in the galaxy, while the Terran Dominion (under the leadership of Emperor Arcturus Mengsk) has been rebuilt, becoming the dominant Terran faction in the sector. Jim Raynor is now the leader of a group of revolutionaries calling themselves Raynor's Raiders, who battle against the Dominion's oppression like a space-borne band of Merry Men. Forever filled with remorse for his role in Kerrigan's tragic transformation, Raynor has become an alcohol-fuelled mercenary wandering through space, scrounging for work and the credits needed to continue his campaign to overthrow Mengsk's rule. Four years have passed, but now the Queen of Blades has returned and age-old



prophecies are in motion.

Four years seems nothing compared to the 12 years gamers have had to patiently wait while Blizzard hammered out the game you're reading about here. *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* is finally here more than a decade after its impossibly popular and influential forefather's release. July 27th, 2010 will forever be remembered as the day that all other RTS games died by Blizzard's hand. Okay, not really, but that sentence was great for dramatic effect, don't you think?

This part of this six-page mega review will deal with the single-player campaign. You can read Geoff's words to get the low-down on whether or not *SC II*'s multiplayer was worth the wait. Hint: it definitely was.

The story begins on Mar Sara, with Jim Raynor holed up in a dingy watering





hole, drenched in alcohol and reminiscing about his past mistakes. After causing some trouble and freeing some folk from the oppressive clutch of the Dominion, Raynor's old partner in crime, Tychus Findlay, shows up and asks for Jim's help on a job for some shady types in exchange for a share of the spoils. Soon enough, the Zerg reappear and the real game kicks in and introduces you to the Hyperion, Jim's battlecruiser.

Gone are the boring briefing rooms of old, replaced with the interactive innards of a ship to tinker around with instead. Much like what we once saw in the *Wing Commander* series, you can now point and click to navigate around the Hyperion, moving through each of the ship's four locations (armoury, bridge, cantina and laboratory), talking to characters, purchasing pretty trinkets (using your hard-earned credits from missions) and generally just participating in one of the most interesting and engaging single-player RTS experiences this side of *Dawn of War II*. To put it bluntly right here, right now:



StarCraft II's story mode is astonishingly polished and thoroughly enjoyable.

While the campaigns in most other RTS titles are more often than not simple cases of get briefed, play mission, finish game, play multiplayer, *StarCraft II*'s campaign offers something more, even if it is only the illusion of something more. I say illusion because you can still just head over to the Hyperion's star map, watch a mission briefing, play mission and repeat, and progress through the campaign that way, but why would you want to when you're handed such a wonderful way of immersing yourself in the game world.

You're actually given things to do between missions other than watch pre-rendered cut-scenes. Instead of just clicking the giant, flashing Next Mission button, you can walk around the Hyperion and become ensconced in the brilliantly realised science-fiction world of *StarCraft II*. You can go to the armoury, have a conversation with Swann and then upgrade the firepower of your marauders, for example. You could go to



the Hyperion's Cantina and partake of some fan service with the fully functioning *Lost Viking* arcade cabinet, which doesn't actually let you play *The Lost Vikings*, that classic Silicon & Synapse (now known as Blizzard Entertainment – surprise!) title that we all played when we were kids, but is still an awesome reference to Blizzard's early days, and a poke at the fans.

Then there are the missions themselves, which are so abundant and inventive in their variety that they never get tired or boring. In one mission you'll be defending your base as daylight-sensitive infested Terrans and Zerg forces assault your carefully planned defences by night, while by day you'll head out in relative safety to destroy infection-ridden structures before starting the process all over again when darkness falls. In another mission you'll take control of the Dark Templar Zeratul as he searches for the

pieces of an ancient Xel'Naga prophecy. The fantastically enjoyable missions, provided by numerous contacts around the galaxy, are all selected from the Hyperion's star map and can be completed in any order you choose.

You'll see familiar faces in the campaign and toy around with many units absent from the multiplayer that you'll recognise from the original game (like firebats, science vessels and vultures). You'll also be able to spend credits to apply upgrades at the armoury, many of which are also absent from the multiplayer (like a turret that can be placed on bunkers). Special objectives can be completed during missions for Zerg and Protoss research bonuses that let you head over to the laboratory to research new units and upgrades (like automated refineries and the burrowing, flame-spewing perdition turret). All of this adds awesome replay



Multiplayer

Blizzard has a reputation that it develops multiplayer games of extremely high quality. Their titles tend not to innovate or stray too far from the beaten track, but they have the habit of being finely-honed games that attract massive audiences. These games are accessible and appreciated by millions of players around the world, from the most hardened professional gamer to the kid who's just discovered the Internet. With that in mind, many who buy *StarCraft II* are going to buy it with the intention of playing multiplayer. *StarCraft* and *Warcraft III* have been huge hits in both the LAN- and pro-gaming scenes for a number of years, with *StarCraft* as the number one pro game in South Korea, and *Warcraft III* spawning the love-it-or-loath-it custom map *Defense of the Ancients*. What this means for Blizzard is a responsibility to combine the best of those two games into *StarCraft II*. No easy feat, especially considering they've had to rebuild Battle.net almost from scratch to accommodate modern expectations, so let's have a look at exactly why this is going to be the RTS game that people play for the next ten years.

As has probably been mentioned a hundred times elsewhere in this review, the multiplayer portion of the game is quite different to the single player campaign. The biggest difference is the selection of units that are given to you to play around with. Wraiths, Goliaths, Medics, Vultures and many other *StarCraft* and *Brood War* favourites haven't made the cut, and while that might initially seem pointless (since Blizzard has gone through the trouble of designing these units for the single player mode), the selection that you're left with is designed with balance and variety in mind. While you're still likely to see screams of "IMBA!!11" when you tear through a supposedly well-defended Protoss base with a swarm of Brood Lords, the fact is that every unit, every strategy and every avenue of attack or defence has a counter. The result of this is an incredibly complex multiplayer mode that's dripping with mystery and surprises. Flavour of the week strategies quickly get thrown out the window when a blatantly obvious hard counter is discovered; you'll be hard-pressed to find too much repetition in a series of games played over the course of a week, let alone a month.

If you belong to the bewildered noob portion of RTS gamers, you're probably feeling a little hesitant to jump into the veritable slaughter-ground that is *StarCraft II* online play. Good call; it's tough out there even in the lower ladders, which is why Battle.net gives you access to a league below even those: the practice league. Limited to 50 games, this gives you a chance to learn the ropes without being picked apart by veterans, in maps specifically designed to be easier to play and prevent rush-tactics. If that's not enough for you, the separate challenge mode is made up of six missions that are designed to teach you the skills needed to survive in the Battle.net wilderness, including hotkey usage, micro-management, multitasking and ability usage. Still no good? You can easily play an unranked, custom game on any map (including the slew of tower defence and *DotA*-likes already populating the servers) with your friends or variable-difficulty AI players without the fear of random play.

The tool holding all of this together, Battle.net, is great for the most part, but a couple of glaring omissions from its feature list let it down somewhat. The system is designed to accommodate those looking for social gaming, with many options for tracking down your friends and playing with them, chatting across games (only *WoW* and *SC2* are supported at this stage) and poking through your friends' vast profile screens, but is missing the most social form of gaming of them all: LAN gaming. That's right; *SC2* does not support LAN play. It also currently has no support for cross-region play online, which is going to put a real damper on those pro-level gamers in Europe or the US looking to take down a mighty Korean. While the cross-game chat is nice, I'd really appreciate a desktop widget or pop-up box for when I'm not in-game; that way I could keep track of my friends without the need to log in to the game. Oh, while I'm at it, a few privacy options wouldn't hurt. In typical Blizzard style, there's already talk of many of the above-mentioned issues being addressed with patches.

Blizzard has created what many would call the perfect multiplayer RTS, part two. Sure, it's fallen behind some advances made by its competition, but what it offers is a solid, balanced and highly accessible game that should appeal to the broad spectrum of gamers out there. If you're looking for a good time, and have a decent Internet connection, hop on Battle.net right now and start gaming.

Geoff Burrows



value, because you won't be able to buy all the upgrades, research everything and experience all the missions (in addition to bonus missions, the choices you make in the campaign will determine whether or not certain missions become available to you) on your first journey through the excellent storyline. Achievement whores even have something to obsess over with the hundreds of achievements in the game, many of which are insanely difficult and offer rewards for your profile.

The multiplayer may not have changed much, because we doubt Blizzard was willing to anger South Korea (who may have decided that their friends to the north ain't so bad and sided with them to launch nukes at Blizzard's headquarters if they'd altered the formula too much). The single player, however, is a fantastically fresh take on the game, filled with entertaining and varied missions, a multitude of things to see and do and just a heavy layer of good old Blizzard polish. It's all instantly recognisable while still retaining that new car smell. You can complain about the lack of LAN and cross-region play at launch all you want. You can flame Blizzard on a thousand Internet forums for their decision to split the game into three parts. None

of it will change the fact that Blizzard has done a remarkable job recapturing the magic of the first game with a sequel that is terrifyingly close to flawless. Blizzard has freshened the series up in all the right places, but left all the aspects that make the series great intact. *Heart of the Swarm* cannot get here soon enough.

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE



>Online services
Battle.net

>Plus

- + Immersive, improved narrative
- + Outstanding single player
- + Brilliant multiplayer

>Bottom Line

If *StarCraft II* were any better, I'd let it violate my innocence. I wouldn't even care if it didn't call the next day.

Look & Listen
EVD • CD • SAHES — HPS • ACCESSORIES
For the Fun

97

Second Opinion

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

StarCraft made one hell of an impact on the PC gaming scene in general, and real-time strategy gaming in particular. Does its sequel stand any chance whatsoever of measuring up to that lofty standard? Of course not: *StarCraft* was an original, a new thing, and no sequel can ever hope to compete on that level. That would be like imagining that one of the sequels to *The Matrix*, even if it were to be a brilliant movie, could hold a candle to the original – just not going to happen. But hang on: I'm not saying that a sequel is doomed to be crud – it just has to work harder to carve its own unique niche, while also staying true to its forerunner's canon.

STRONG ON STORY

Blizzard's RTS titles have always handled the story angle somewhat better than a certain other major RTS franchise. In *Wings of Liberty*, they have truly outdone themselves. I don't think I have ever played such a soulful and emotionally engaging game. The characters come to life not only with superb animations and voice acting, but with a depth of feelings and drives that speaks of careful character design. In order to avoid spoilers, suffice it to say that Jim Raynor is the protagonist of this particular chapter, and he is a jaded and cynical man now: he lost Sarah Kerrigan to the Zerg early in the original campaign, only to have ever since been forced to face her as a mortal adversary, and the man responsible for this turn of events is now the despotic emperor of the Terran Dominion, and has been for four years. Raynor's sole purpose, at the beginning of the campaign, is to overthrow Arcturus Mengsk, or die trying to even the score. The mechanisms for conveying

the story are various: there are, of course, the usual video cut-scenes, of the highest standard and more plentiful than ever before; however, in addition to these, there are also numerous conversations that can be initiated with various characters, and considerable chatter during missions. The overall mood is effectively conveyed with a rich soundtrack. Ultimately, it is a story about redemption – but that's all I should tell you.

LUBRICATING THE WAR MACHINE

The in-mission game mechanics are exactly what one would expect from *StarCraft*: the structure of the game has changed very little since the original, though it has evolved in minor ways (such as the fact that now there are two types of add-on structures for Terrans, and barracks now get to build them too, and the interface is updated to bring it up to modern standards.) If you know *StarCraft*, you will very quickly learn *StarCraft II* – all you'll need is to learn the new units, and a few new shortcuts.

It is between missions where the interesting stuff happens, at least in terms of the single-player campaign. Raynor's crusade needs to be fed, as it were: money is needed to equip the army, and research needs to be conducted to upgrade its various elements. The "quasi-economic" aspects are quite thin, to be honest, generally mostly boiling down to choices about the order in which things will happen, but it's nevertheless an extra layer of immersion, and great fun. Additionally, the campaign follows a semi-linear approach – some missions are only available after certain others, but the player has substantial control over the order in which they are played. Although the game centres on Raynor's Raiders and is therefore Terran-centric,



Third Opinion

A TALE OF TWO SEQUELS

Two of the big releases we cover this month, *Crackdown 2* and *StarCraft II*, share a curious resonance. Where both are sequels firmly tethered to their origins, they each create a vastly different impression. Where *Crackdown 2* may feel stale and unsurprising, dragging on with a feeling of been-there-done-that, *StarCraft II* feels solid and self-assured, a polished refinement on material that was better suited to being polished instead of completely overhauled or replaced. Where *Crackdown 2* comes across as wasted potential *StarCraft II* - while highly familiar - feels a lot more satisfying.

StarCraft II's familiarity depends entirely on what you're looking for. Those seeking a revolution in the genre on the multiplayer side, something that has as much of an impact now as *StarCraft* did in 1998, may feel jilted. While the multiplayer could be accused of being more of the same only polished up and presented with golden-trim, that would be ignoring how the

singleplayer side moves the genre forward in the representation of its storyline and campaign experience.

Amidst the hype and excitement of its multiplayer, it's as if Blizzard quietly and without a fuss decided they would reaffirm the importance of singleplayer games, staking out a claim on the legitimacy of the solo experience. In that regard, *StarCraft II* is fresh and exciting, an aspect that may be overlooked by those who jump straight into multiplayer and never look back.

Regardless of which side of the game you focus on, both are rich, deep and rewarding experiences. The longer you play, the more of the thought and planning Blizzard puts into their games gets revealed. While it would be easy to snipe at the game for only having one campaign for Terran instead of the traditional three, one for each race, the Terran campaign is in itself a far more complete game than even the original managed with all races combined.

Miktar Dracon

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Blizzard has managed to sneak in a few Protoss missions in a very elegant manner.

Oh, there is a bonus game-within-the-game: it's called *Lost Viking*, and is a vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up similar to *Slapfight*, in which the player controls a spaceship that blasts its way through waves of enemies, collecting power-ups, and taking on end-of-level bosses. It is available, appropriately, through an arcade machine on Raynor's battlecruiser.

EYE- AND EARGASMIC

Just as my review copy arrived, and just before I installed it, my graphics card cooked itself. I was, of course, not amused, but this was actually a blessing in disguise: I was forced to play it on an old GeForce 8600GT for a couple of days until my shiny new card arrived, and got to see how it performs on such lower-end hardware. I must say, I was very impressed. I was despondent at first at how many of the settings I had to set to 'medium' or 'low' – but when I got into the game, I was blown away: I couldn't believe what Blizzard managed to show at such low settings! Other game developers would do well to get some lessons. Of course, when the 400-series card arrived and everything got cranked up to max, the game went from "really good-looking" to "amazingly breath-taking". The visual splendour is accompanied by rich sounds and a great soundtrack (though some players may tire of the "hillbilly" style of music that Raynor apparently listens to).

AND WAR BROKE OUT

Of course, many players are not just after the single-player experience (though it's amazing how many are), but are rather here for multiplayer action. Blizzard has revamped Battle.net for *StarCraft II*, emphasising ease of access and of getting into a game. There is also a cool feature that lets you chat with any of your friends who are currently signed in, regardless of where in the game you are (single or multiplayer, in the menus – wherever.) This is hardly a new feature (Steam, for example, has had something even better for quite some time) but is largely a novelty for exclusively-RTS players. As well as chatting and playing, players can also access each other's profiles, with Battle.net keeping track of a huge variety of achievements (again, relating to every aspect of the game – single, multi, whatever). There is also a feature that allows a player to add friends from his or her Facebook friends list; this feature is easy to use and works very well.

THE VERDICT

While *Wings of Liberty* cannot (through no fault of its own) hope to make the same sort of impact on gaming as did its precursor, it has certainly blown away this jaded and cynical reviewer. Despite its somewhat elevated price point, I do not hesitate to heartily recommend it to anyone – and if you are new to *StarCraft*, who knows: perhaps it may even influence the way the original did so many people, a good 12 years ago... I can't wait for the next chapter!

NAG

Alex Jelagin

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Great audio and visuals
- + Engrossing campaign
- + Great multiplayer action

>Minus

- A few minor bugs
- No LAN multiplayer

>Bottom Line

If you play RTS at all, and if you only buy one game this year, then this should be it.

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NAG



Demon's Souls

No one said saving the world would be easy

GENRE > RPG

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

SET IN THE FICTIONAL kingdom of Boletaria, *Demon's Souls* tells the story of a brave warrior's epic and arduous struggle to rid his world of a burgeoning demon infestation that threatens to end it. It is a dark time in Boletaria, as a demonic charge slowly overruns the world, overseen by the mysterious and powerful Old One. The kingdom itself is a bleak representation of a medieval fantasy setting, replete with vicious dragons, skeleton warriors and demonic knights among many others. Boletaria is divided into five distinct regions, each connected by a hub known as the Nexus, which serves not just as the connecting point between levels, but also offers players access to various shops and statistic upgrades.

The game itself is an action-RPG hybrid of sorts where players can choose to engage in melee combat, spell-casting or ranged attacks depending on their preferences. At the outset of the game, you'll choose a character class that affects your initial statistics, but this simply serves as a starting point for your character – as you progress through the game, you're able to upgrade any of your statistics at any time. So although you might have started the game out as a brawler, if you run into opposition that's more susceptible to magic attacks you can simply strengthen your character's spell-casting attributes, irrespective of your starting class.

Of course there's more to the game than simply hacking away at enemies and

firing off spells. All the while you'll have to deal with narrow walkways and other environmental hazards, not to mention a variety of devious traps that litter the levels. As for the enemies themselves, simply playing through the game's tutorial will make it abundantly clear that each and every enemy you encounter in this game is a dangerous beast, and is more than capable of putting an early end to your quest. Even the slightest mistake in combat can prove disastrous, and as you play through the game you'll quickly develop an appreciation for the possibility that near-certain death lurks behind every shadowy corner. Since the game's boss fights also serve as its only checkpoints, if you die you're sent back to the point at which you entered the level, and forced to do it all over again, and hopefully

manage to avoid succumbing to the same fate as you did the last time, or at least to progress a little further before being wiped out again.

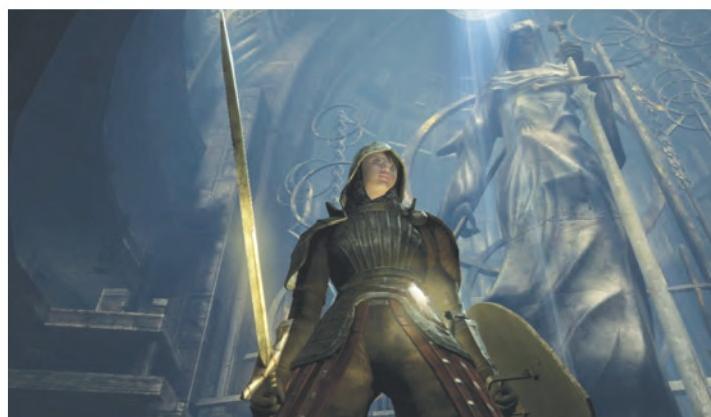
Complicating matters is that as you defeat enemies, you'll amass Souls, which serve as the game's currency. These souls can be spent on new weapons or armour, as well as on statistic point upgrades for your character. The catch, however, is that there's no way to bank these Souls for later use. If your character dies, you'll retain all of your weapons and equipment, but your Soul balance reverts to zero. You'll then find yourself reincarnated at the start of the level, but in a "phantom" form that only has around half the hit-points of your normal form. Should you manage to make it back to the point where you died, and touch the bloodstain that you left behind, the game is generous enough to give you back all the Souls that you lost. Should you die again on your way back to that bloodstain, however, those Souls disappear for good.

It's undoubtedly a rather cruel game mechanic, but it soon becomes apparent that you'll never die cheaply in *Demon's Souls* – the game's challenges are difficult, but they're not impossible, and each time you die (and you *will* die) you learn something. If you fell from a bridge that collapsed, you'll know that you need to

run rather than creep across. If it was a powerful enemy hiding in some dark corner, you'll know that you might need to cast buffing spells before you reach it. Either way, each death gives you a little more insight as to how to ultimately beat this behemoth of a game, and each victory is so much more satisfying for the challenge that was involved in attaining it.

There's also an innovative online component in *Demon's Souls*. If you play through the game whilst connected, you'll be able to read messages that other players have left at various points which might warn you of impending danger. Or you might stumble across another player's bloodstain, which you can touch to see a replay of that character's final moments, giving you a possible clue as to how you might avoid that same fate. Other players can also join your game (and vice versa) in the form of Blue Phantoms, to help each other overcome enemies and ultimately revert to their normal form with full hit-points. It's a strange but effective implementation of online play that expertly creates a feeling of shared purpose between players whilst still maintaining an eerie invisible barrier between them.

Visually, *Demon's Souls* creates a bleak and dreary take on the typical medieval fantasy setting. It's all about storm-clouds and menacingly shadowy



castles, and the game delivers splendidly with convincingly detailed locales and fluid animations. The stars of the show are undoubtedly the bosses, not only for their sheer imposing size, but also for their wonderfully twisted detail that will undoubtedly send a chill down any player's spine. Although the game does suffer from the rare frame-rate hiccup, the visuals generally don't miss a beat, and the eerie sweeping orchestral score and visceral sound effects make the game all the more immersive.

Demon's Souls is an RPG that will test the limits of even the most hardcore gamer – it's a demanding and difficult journey, one that is often stern in its punishment but never becomes unfair, and one which is strangely, almost masochistically, addictive. For each challenge you overcome, the game rewards you by throwing an even tougher challenge at you, but the ultimate experience is an engrossing one, and each hard-fought victory in *Demon's Souls* is immensely satisfying, and while it's certainly not suited to casual gaming, it's a diabolically gripping experience, and undoubtedly one of the PlayStation 3's top RPGs.

NAG

Adam Liebman

THE SCORE

16
www.pegi.info



MUST PLAY

>**Plus**
+ Deeply challenging
+ Absorbing
+ Stunning visuals

>**Minus**
- Brutally unforgiving

Look Listen
DVD CD GAME MP3 ACCESSORIES
For the People

>Bottom Line

Offering a fiendishly difficult but superbly rewarding experience, *Demon's Souls* is a masterful example of what an RPG should be.

92



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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11

Two continents, one cup

GENRE > Sports

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

OKAY, SO I PROMISED RedTide I'd try to write a review of this game without making any Tiger Woods jokes. I'll give it a shot, but it presents a challenge for two key reasons, the first being that it's just too much fun to poke at Tiger these days, but the second, more important reason is that there's really not a whole heck of a lot to say about the latest incarnation in the series that hasn't been said in the reviews I've written of the previous three games.

That's not to say this isn't a good game – quite the contrary. The *Tiger Woods* games have been excellent pretty much from the word go, and EA Tiburon's philosophy of making only small, incremental changes every year has meant the level of quality has remained consistent, while delivering enough new content to keep the game fresh. Now, whether or not that means it's worth buying *Tiger Woods PGA Tour XX* every year is another matter altogether, but if you only play every second or third game in the series, you'll definitely notice the steady improvement. In a way, that reflects the conservative nature of golf in general. And let's be honest, it's not like they could add rocket launchers or jetpacks to spice things up [Well they could actually... and zombies! Ed].

So while 90 percent of the game remains more or less the same, there are a few new features worth mentioning in *Tiger Woods 11*, the biggest being the inclusion of The

Ryder Cup tournament. For those of you who don't follow golf, but are for some reason still reading this review, The Ryder Cup is a competition between teams of 12 golfers from the United States and Europe and is played every other year alternating between the two continents. Played over three days, the tournament involves fourball, foursome [*giggle, Ed*] and singles matches. In *TW11*, as one of the team captains, you select your squad and then play as an individual golfer during the matches. In between holes you can change which golfer you control, which can be useful if you see one of your groups is struggling in its matchup. Winning a match earns your team one point, while a draw earns a half. To win the Ryder cup, you need to accumulate 14.5 points, which is quite a lot of golf. I mention this because there's no way to save your game in between holes. Once you've started, you're in for the long haul. You can play the tournament offline by yourself or with up to three friends, or online in a full 24-golfer multiplayer extravaganza.

There are a few new twists to the core game mechanics aimed at making the experience more challenging for devoted fans of the series. The most significant is an optional camera perspective dubbed "True-Aim", which tries to emulate a more authentic first-person point of view for the player. Instead of using the traditional aiming circle, you only get an arrow and some yardage markers on the course to gauge your shot. Additionally, when you strike the ball, the camera continues to follow the ball from the perspective of the golfer, rather

Pay for multiplayer

It's worth mentioning that *TW11* (and all future EA Sports games) uses EA's new Online Pass, which requires you to enter a code printed on the back of the manual, which is then linked to your EA account, in order to play online. (Oh, and you get a new driver for Tiger, too. Yeah!) It's not a big deal if you bought the game new, but if you buy a second-hand copy of the game, you'll have to pay \$10 to purchase a new code in order to play online. If you just rent the game, however, you are entitled to a free seven-day trial of the service.



Geographically challenged

It's not exactly news that Americans are a little lacking when it comes to their knowledge of geography. A recent survey by *National Geographic* found that only 37% of Americans between the ages of 18-24 could locate Iraq on a map, despite the fact they've been fighting a war there since 2003. So I guess it comes as little surprise, really, that the Ryder Cup teams in *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11*, which are supposed to pit the best golfers in the US against the best in Europe, are a bit confused. By default, the US team includes Vijay Singh (he's from Fiji) and Camilo Villegas (Colombia). It also includes Mike Weir, who is from Canada, but since most Canadians secretly wish they were Americans, we suppose that counts.

What's the difference between a car and a golf ball? Tiger can drive a ball 400 yards.



than from the ball's perspective, making it much more difficult to see where the ball will land. The system succeeds in making the experience feel more like real golf and less like a videogame and is much more challenging. The traditional view is still there, though, for the faint of heart.

The final major change to the game is the new "Focus" system. Every time you boost power, add spin to a shot or use the putt preview, you use some of your Focus power. When you run out, you can't use those features any more. Every time you hit a shot without using focus, you gain some back. So no more rampant button-mashing every drive and approach shot.

And that's about it... and I've run out of space, so no Tiger jokes today. I can't promise there won't be any in the captions, though.

NAG
Chris Bistline

THE SCORE



>Plus

- + Just as slick as ever
- + 24-player online tournaments
- + True-Aim perspective

>Minus

- Can't save during a round

Look Listen
For the Future

>Bottom Line

EA Tiburon is as consistent as ever, delivering another top-notch *Tiger Woods* game. Just don't expect anything truly groundbreaking.

82

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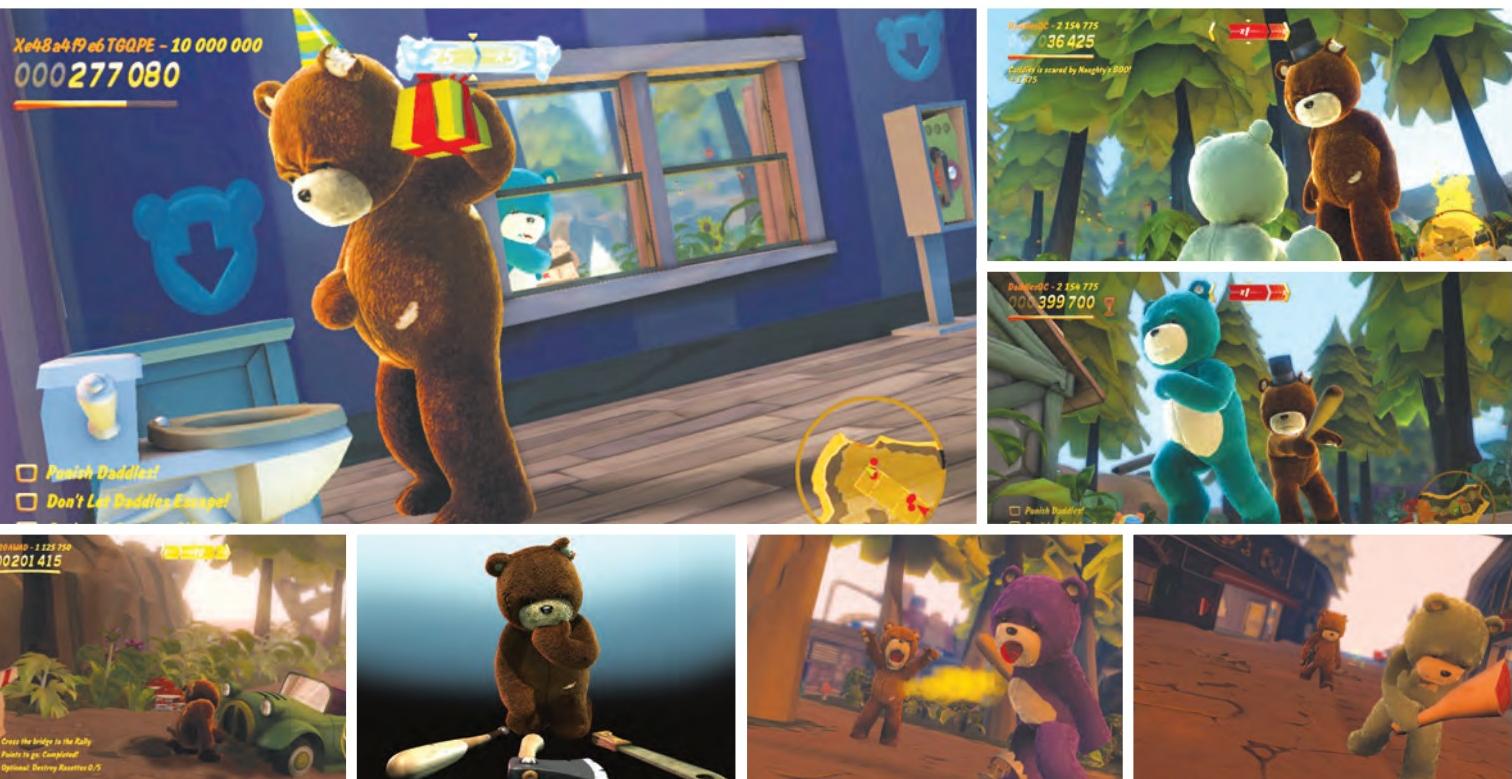
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COMING SOON TO THE MALL AT REDS PRETORIA



Naughty Bear

If you go down to the woods today...

GENRE > Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

WHILE THE DEBATE ABOUT violent video games causing violent behaviour isn't exactly raging these days, it's still got a good simmer going. The topic is always ready to make a reappearance and, when the right game comes along, it most certainly will. Developers, retailers and parents still need to act responsibly in this regard.

So the release of a game like *Naughty Bear* could raise an eyebrow or two among those concerned about this kind of thing. The premise is simple enough: on a beautiful island inhabited exclusively by cute teddy bears, *Naughty Bear* is teased, ostracised and generally treated badly by his peers. And so the cute little critter snaps, and exacts violent revenge on the inhabitants of the island – very violent revenge.

Naughty Bear is like *Manhunt* with cuddly toys. The degree of violence is extremely brutal, as the teddy goes around with knives, clubs, baseball bats, golf clubs, swords and a myriad other weapons, dispatching his "friends" in a way that could be described as graphic, if there was blood rather than stuffing flying about. The end result is amusing, sure, but it is also oddly disturbing. The motions that *Naughty Bear* goes through in dispatching the other cute cuddly critters seem all too realistic.

Playing as *Naughty Bear*, the player will be able to undertake numerous missions in the game. The end result is more or less the same (kill everyone) but the methods differ. In some modes, the player will have free reign, while in others they will have to complete the level without taking damage, or will only be able to perform kills using



Does a bear sh*t in the woods?

environmental elements. These could be fuse boxes, camp fires, car doors, or anything like that.

The game looks rather pretty, and is initially quite a bit of fun (despite the very annoying narrator, who sounds like he came straight off of the Teletubbies set). But the novelty wears off quite quickly. Each weapon has its own specific special kill move, but the animations for these are always exactly the same – and the variety of weapons on each level isn't huge. More challenging opponents are added to the mix, like cop bears and ninja bears, but they don't do much to add variety to the game. New skins can be unlocked for *Naughty Bear*, too, but these claim to have more of an effect on the dynamics of the title than is readily apparent. The game, in other words, gets tired very quickly.

The brightly coloured environments and cute characters are well presented, and the animations are well handled. The sound is what one would expect, without many surprises, and the control scheme is simple enough, although sometimes a bit unresponsive.

Naughty Bear plays into the kind of

humour that is popular among many gamers, but the game doesn't warrant very long play sessions. It is a distraction, rather than an obsession, and even with multiplayer elements, this is a title that people will prefer to play in shorter bursts, rather than protracted gaming sessions. Trying it before you buy it is the best idea, and do remember, it's not one for the kids!

NAG

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE



www.pegi.info



1



2 - 4



N/A



>Plus

- + Cute idea
- + Fairly good graphics

>Minus

- Repetitive
- A bit disturbing

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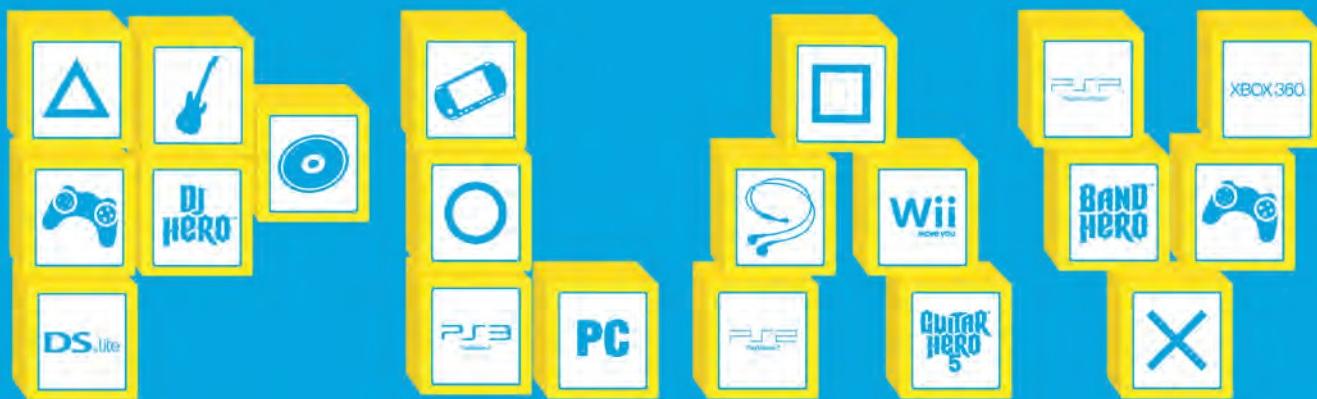
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>Bottom Line

Naughty Bear was a great idea, but the execution lead to a rather pedestrian effort.

58

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For the Fans



International Cricket 2010

At the crease

GENRE > Sport

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

CRICKET GAMES ARE FEW and far between, and really good cricket games... well, they're fewer and further. It seems that the sport is a tough one to capture 'electronically', and with the market being potentially small for these kinds of titles, the work that could – or should – go into these titles simply doesn't. To date, there haven't been many cricket-based titles, compared to other sports, and the ones that we have seen haven't managed to capture the spirit and dynamics of the sport to a degree that would make cricket lovers sit up and pay attention. In fact, it would seem that even big companies, like EA, have given up on creating a decent cricket simulation.

Codemasters haven't, though. They're still plugging away at the idea, hoping for a title that will hit a six, if you'll excuse the trite and very forced analogy. Last year they brought us *Ashes Cricket 2009*, which managed, on a few levels, to outstrip previous attempts at bringing this complex sport to virtual platforms. The game displayed great ideas, but still needed some maturity to reach full potential.

The latest attempt in what appears to be an ongoing series is *International Cricket 2010*. It displays a very real progression from *Ashes Cricket* last year, but the franchise still has a way to go to be a truly brilliant cricket simulation. Sure, it's the best one on the market, but in all honesty, it's the only one on the market. Being top dog when the pound is empty is easy.

One of the big changes that players of the previous title will see is that the view-point of the game has been shifted dramatically. This is most certainly an improvement, although



many people will need a few balls to get used to the idea of having what is basically a third person viewpoint in a cricket game. Still, it does add a lot of excitement to the game, and helps generate a greater degree of player investment in the title. It almost personalises things, which is a good move.

Another good move would be for the developers to pick up a few more licenses. Call me pedantic, but only having the Australian and English cricket teams properly presented in the game really gets my goat (they are our rivals, after all.) Although the player can undertake the arduous task of renaming all the players on any given team through the player editor, the developers very thoughtfully restricted character counts, making it impossible (for example) to enter the name "Herschelle." If you can live with having names like Mokrel, Kallace and DaNinny for your players, I'm sure you won't mind the whole thing too much.

The tricky fielding mechanic makes a return this year – you remember the one which demanded absolute split second timing from the player? As things stand, the return of this mechanic is the game's

weakest point. Batting and bowling are much better with the new "Action Cam" view mode, and the AI has been improved (although it still pulls off a few stupid stunts every now and then). Still, if cricket is your thing, and you want a game, you'll want to get this one. It is the only choice you have.

NAG

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE



www.pegi.info



1 - 4



2



2

Look Listen
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Play the Future

>Plus
+ Action Cam
+ Better looks

>Minus
- Get some licenses! - Fielding

>Bottom Line

It's the best cricket game out there. It's also the only cricket game out there. The math is simple.

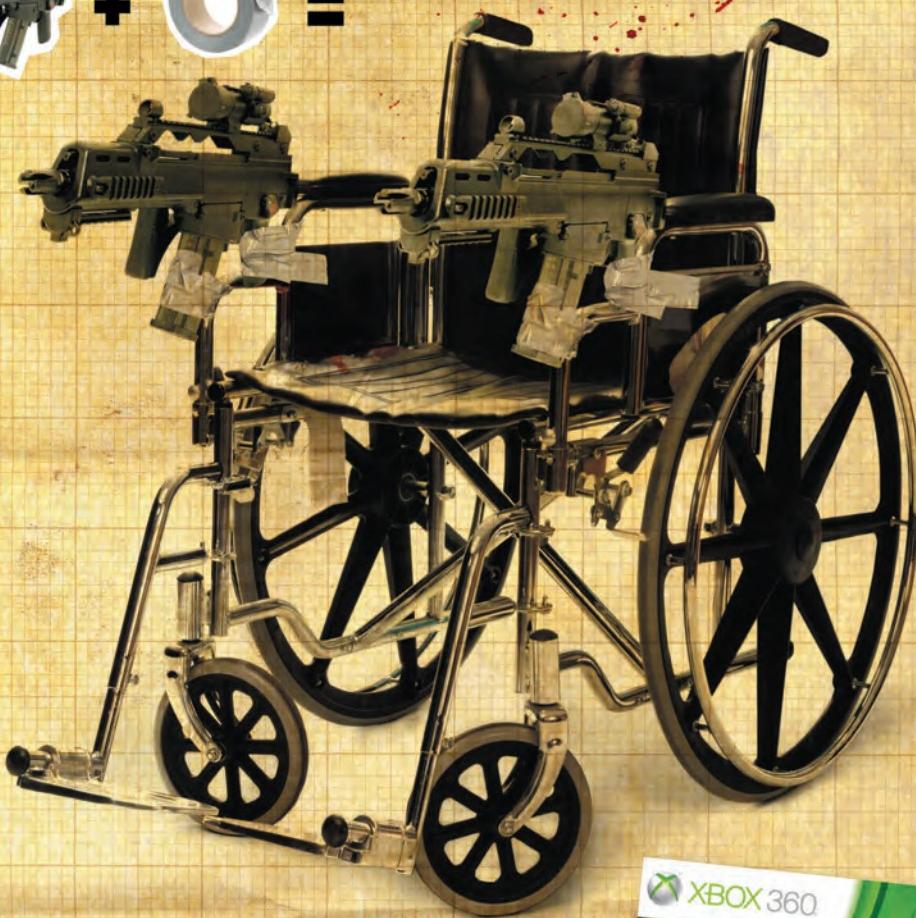
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THE BLITZKRIEG



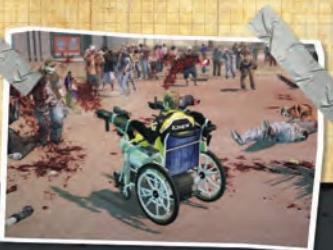
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Pure Football

It's pure something, alright...

GENRE > Sports

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

WITH THE EYES OF the world still square after the Soccer World Cup and our ears still ringing from all those vuvuzelas, gamers still in the spirit of the event may well look to a virtual version of the beautiful game to keep the ball rolling (if you will pardon the pun). Sure, they could have bought this particular game before the whole thing started, but still... football games, in general, will prove quite popular for a while.

Those that want something different from the tried and tested football franchises may well look at Ubisoft's first attempt at making a soccer game. The idea is enticing enough: *Pure Football* takes players away from the stadiums and referees, presenting them with a five on five soccer experience very much in the spirit of the *FIFA Street* series from Electronic Arts. The player is challenged with putting together a team, comprised of a number of the 230 players present in the game, and leading them to unofficial football glory. No crowds, no referees... just football.

Sounds great, doesn't it? Well, it isn't. Not by a long shot.

The game's first breakdown is in its presentation. While it does feature some nice visual elements, the players themselves are very cartoony and are almost indistinguishable from each other. Enthusiasts, particularly, will find this bothersome. What's the point in collecting great players if you can't tell them apart quickly?

Forgiving players will be able to look past that, most likely in the hope that the game will make up for its anonymous looks with superb action. But from the start it is a very difficult title, pitting the player's initial sub-standard team against a far better one. This is not helped by the flawed game dynamics, which make scoring a goal very difficult. See, the player doesn't get to aim a shot at goals and shoot. Rather, they have a special shot meter that they have to make use of. This shot meter requires precise timing. Get it right, and a goal is guaranteed. Get it wrong, and there is no chance of a goalie fumble or luck allowing the goal to go through. The system itself isn't a bad idea, but it strips the element of luck out of the equation – and we all know that luck does come into football at times.

This problem isn't helped by an often idiotic AI. Goalies, particularly, aren't smart enough, often diving the wrong way for what would (in the real world) be the most pedestrian of saves.

Additionally, for a game that has no referee, *Pure Football* is very quick to hand out free kicks and penalties. Every slide tackle is guaranteed to result in one, whether it's a foul or not.

As Ubisoft's first entrance into the football market, *Pure Football* is a weak effort. This is rather surprising, coming from such a top notch publisher. If they want to tackle franchises like *FIFA* and *PES*, they're going to have to do a lot better than *Pure Football*. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



THE SCORE



www.pegi.info



1 - 4



2



2 - 4



PONIES

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>Plus
+ A good idea
+ Some nice visual elements

>Minus
- Control scheme
- Unbalanced

>Bottom Line

A game that claims to be far more than it is.

50

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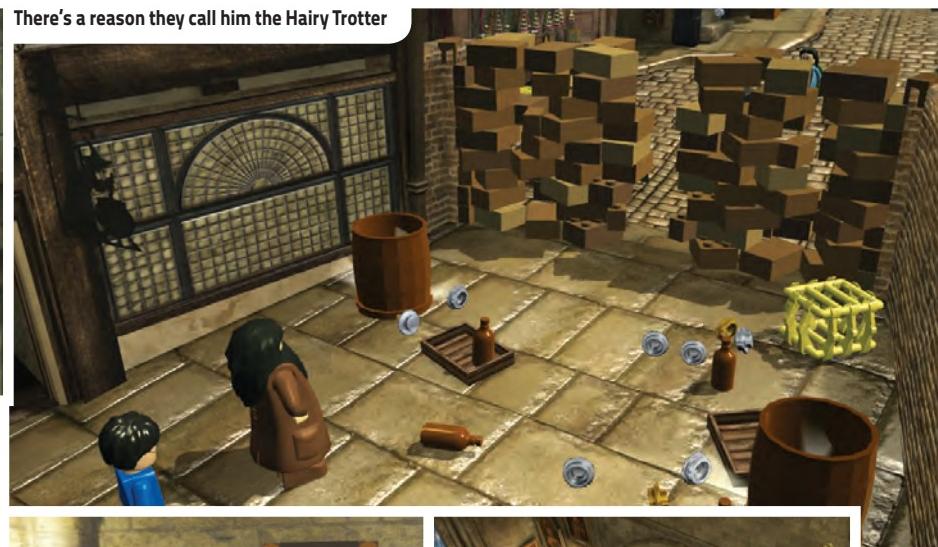
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There's a reason they call him the Hairy Trotter



LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4

Building magic

GENRE > Action Adventure

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THERE HAVE BEEN A number of LEGO games released, with the majority of them following the plots set by the George Lucas films. In fact, with the exception of *LEGO Batman*, they have all been based either on the *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* universes. The next deviation from this norm comes in the form of *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4* and the developers have managed to produce a title that is fresh and exciting in this new guise. In fact, many people felt that the series was beginning to seriously lag, but this new iteration has breathed life into the overall look and feel of the franchise.

As the name suggests, JK Rowling's characters get the LEGO treatment, although the visuals of the game (naturally, if you consider the publisher) are based on the very popular movies that her books spawned. The player will be able to play as Harry, Ron, Hermione, Hagrid or any of the more than 160 characters that the player can unlock during the course of the game. The environments are beautifully recreated, and the game features favourite scenes from *The Philosopher's Stone*, *The Chamber of Secrets*, *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and *The Goblet of Fire* stories.

The biggest issue that people may have had with this title has been rather smartly sorted out. See, the LEGO games were becoming a little stale, without much innovation. The combat was becoming increasingly lacklustre, and later vehicle based challenges just didn't deliver the goods. In this new game, vehicles and



combat are kept to a necessary minimum, which is actually a blessing. This allows the player to truly explore the levels, which are crammed with puzzles, discoverable items and more. The player will also develop a sense of continuity in the free roaming areas (which include places like Diagon Alley and common areas in Hogwarts) thanks to challenges that can only be completed at later stages in the game. These are present throughout the game, adding a high level of value when playing it through all over again.

The core of the game dynamic stems from the spells that the characters learn. These can be used in various ways, particularly for the familiar LEGO block manipulation that is present in the franchise. This manipulation is a bit more complex in this version, though, and many of the puzzles will need the player to build specific things, using spells to levitate LEGO blocks and fit them all together.

On the multiplayer front, the game presents the usual drop-in/drop-out idea from before, and allows players to wander further away from each other through a split screen system, which is employed when the characters aren't both in the

same camera space.

Crammed with humour that fans will appreciate, the game is possessed of simple controls, recognisable events and characters, and a fresh approach to the LEGO game ideas that proved popular in the past. It is appropriate for youngsters, which is a bonus, but older gamers will also find charm and appeal in this very fun title from Traveller's Tales and Warner Bros.

NAG
Walt Pretorius



THE SCORE

7	1 - 2	0	2
www.pegi.info			

>Plus
+ Great control
+ Fresh ideas

>Minus
- Very little online support
- More appeal for fans

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>Bottom Line

This fresh take on existing LEGO game ideas breathes new life into the franchise.

80



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TURN ON TOMORROW



Red Steel 2

Sword slinging in the Wild... Umm... East?

GENRE > Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

READ STEEL WAS AN exciting concept, but the game lacked all kinds of polish and presence. The idea was great, but the delivery just didn't... well, deliver. The idea of sword fighting and the Wii go together like cheese and a hamburger, but the control scheme that would allow the kind of finesse required wasn't in place when the original title was released.

Red Steel 2 is the original game's successor in title alone. It takes place in a very different setting, has taken on a whole new approach, and comes to the market at a time when Nintendo themselves have added the best refinement to the Wii ever – the MotionPlus peripheral. Thanks to this handy device, user input is now far more accurate, allowing the kind of approach that a sword fighting game would require. So, *Red Steel 2* is a very different beast then.

The most noticeable difference is the change in setting. Where the first game played out in a modern world gangster type arena, *Red Steel 2* transports the player to the town of Caldera, an alternate reality that sees Eastern culture collide with Spaghetti Westerns in a way that might seem messy, but actually works rather nicely. The fact that the bow-legged, Southern-drawling Sheriff is Japanese seems perfectly obvious in this setting.

The player takes on the role of a nameless warrior from a clan long thought vanquished, who returns to the town to dispense justice through sword and six-shooter... while trying to find the legendary Kusagari Katana.

The action is fairly well paced. The player will find tutorials (disguised as dojo-training)



interspersed with often frantic fights. The Nunchuk controller handles motion, while the Wii remote takes care of direction, sword strokes and gun-fire. The controls feel natural; swinging the controller will result in savage slices and jabs, while aiming in and hitting the bottom mounted trigger will unleash a hail of bullets. The controls aren't perfect – every now and then the directional controls feel too sensitive and jittery – but the overall effect is rather impressive.

It's one of those games where a few flicks of the wrists just won't do: thanks to the MotionPlus, the player will have to make big, realistic movements during sword fights. The bigger the movement, the more damage is inflicted. It's a pretty realistic approach to swinging a blade. The player will lose finesse in bigger motions, but will pack more of a punch. And possibly dislocate a shoulder or pull a muscle. A decent session of *Red Steel 2* will leave the player quite worn out.

While the game doesn't compete with some of the other action titles on the market, it is (without a doubt) one of the finest Wii games ever released. The developers were incredibly thoughtful when putting the game together, analysing every eventuality to

ensure a great experience. The game even allows for the calibration of the MotionPlus whenever necessary, although the controls remain stable for the most part.

If you are a Wii gamer, or even think that this sounds like a good idea, *Red Steel 2* is a must. It sets a new bar for the console, and promises excellent potential for the future of the franchise. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE



>**Plus**
+ Excellent sword fighting
+ Fun story
+ Awesome setting



>**Minus**
- Sometimes finicky

Look Listen
For the Fun!

>Bottom Line

A great option for Wii gamers and action fans, this is one of the best Wii games ever made.

88

DEVELOPER > Ruffian Games PUBLISHER > Microsoft Game Studios DISTRIBUTOR > Microsoft WEB > www.crackdownoncrime.com



Crackdown 2

Justice at any cost, Agent!

GENRE > Sandbox / Third-person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

CRAWDOWN 2 IS THE most solid let-down you'll play this year [*perhaps this is why they still haven't sent us a review copy? Ed.*]. There, my harsh honesty for the day. The keyword in the original *Crackdown* was "potential". Sure, it was slim in content (but deep in execution). Sure, its control scheme was optimised for crowd control over precision at the cost of more finely tuned encounters. But *Crackdown* exemplified how a single awesome premise carries a game: being a superhuman agent of destruction, able to *literally* leap over tall buildings in a single bound attached to one of the best collectible systems of all time. The three years since have been filled with anticipation and at least one sophomore eager to get in on the action (*Prototype*).

Sadly, developer Ruffian has made all the best-of-the-worst decisions with *Crackdown 2*. Playing it so safe as to change virtually nothing, there is a dearth of surprises and excitement.

The exact same city is refreshed with an overlay of largely visual destruction; the leaping and orb collecting are as exciting and addictive as ever – and the star of the show once again. Yet the barely functioning gunplay, unexciting anonymous goon enemies, slow and difficult camera, plus a poorly developed attempt to shoehorn zombies in, leaves *Crackdown 2* feeling like the fifth tired entry in a wrung-out franchise despite still being in its training pants.

For those who never played the original, it's hard to say how impressive *Crackdown 2* will seem. Other games have since surpassed the *Crackdown* control scheme and standards for playability (outside of mega-jumping). Releasing such a package at full retail price also leaves the buyer feeling jilted. It's already a little tired to snipe that a sequel you don't care for should have "just been a DLC package" but in *Crackdown 2*'s case, there's merit to that idea.

NAG Miktar Dracon

THE SCORE

18

www.pegi.info



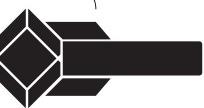
1



2 - 16



2 - 4



>Plus

- + Fun, especially in co-operative play
- + Amusing deathmatch

>Minus

- Gets old fast, even though it's a pretty short game.

Look Listen
FOR THE FIRST TIME

57

>Bottom Line

Wasted potential, even though it's fun to play.



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Maniac Mansion



WHEN DAVE MILLER'S HOT blonde cheerleader girlfriend Sandy Pantz is abducted by local eccentric Dr Fred Edison, he promptly enlists a bunch of his college buddies and launches one of those B-movie rescue missions that's almost certain to end badly. Or at least one guy locked up in a subterranean dungeon with only a stolen hamster, and no apparent means of escape. Disembodied tentacles with despotic aspirations of world domination and a post-adolescent survivalist paramilitary commando with pituitary gigantism may or may not be involved.

In what's probably a one-of-a-kind gimmick in old school adventure games, *Maniac Mansion* lets players choose three playable characters (Dave plus another two) from a roster of seven, each with their own skills and

idiosyncrasies. Bernard, for example, is a cowardly nerd who will flee from anything even remotely resembling danger, but is also able to do more useful stuff than any of the other characters. Jeff, on the other hand, can repair the telephone. And do pretty much nothing else, really. Basically, the difficulty of the game is determined by which characters the player chooses.

Any combination of characters can win the game, however, with a number of different possible endings depending on who is used, and who survives. If everyone dies, it's game over. Unusually for a Lucasfilm (later LucasArts) game – and a feature chucked in all subsequent titles – it's also possible to end up in an unwinnable situation, should a character carrying important items die. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

Terrifying Trivia

- Project developers Ron Gilbert and David Fox started development using assembly language, but quickly realised they'd have to build their own framework to support the game's requirements. The *SCUMM* engine (or Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*) was born, and the rest of that story is, well, game history.
- *Maniac Mansion* turns up again, in its entirety, on Weird Ed's computer in the 1993 sequel, *Day of the Tentacle*. It's a mystery wrapped in a riddle inside an enigma. Or a game in a game. Mind-blowing metaphysics notwithstanding, it's probably the most totally awesome Easter egg ever. Free game!
- The game's a bit notorious for its red herrings, including a conspicuous staircase that can't be climbed and a chainsaw for which, to any pre-internet FAQ player's perennial perplexity, there's no fuel. In a subsequent game, *Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders*, players can pick up fuel marked "For chainsaws only", but there's no chainsaw. Oh, you guys.
- A Canadian TV show very loosely based on the game was filmed and aired between 1990 and 1993. One episode featured professional weirdo David Cronenberg, guest-starring as himself. Presumably infected with something, the otherwise inscrutable significance of this lost on the viewers, and culminating in an irrelevant sex scene and contrived personal actualisation. Or something.

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Ster Kinekor Entertainment is giving away *SBK X: Superbike World Championship* hampers to four lucky subscribers. Each hamper consists of a limited edition game, (2 Xbox 360 and 2 PS3) a lanyard and other Ster Kinekor merchandise.

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BRAAAAAAAINS Part 4

WHO DO THAT VOODOO?

EVERY FILM OR PIECE of literature that depicts zombies makes its own attempt to explain the sudden appearance of the undead: restless souls, parasitic aliens, necromantic tinkering or man-made viruses are all common concepts, but in truth, "real-life" zombies are a lot simpler than one might imagine.

According to Haitian folklore, zombies are the mindless servants of a bokor, a sorcerer, or houngan (priest) of the Haitian "vodou" religion. To gain control over one such zombie, the bokor will poison the living subject with the toxins of a puffer fish and powders of the *datura* plant, causing severe neurological damage that slows ones heartbeat and breathing to near-stasis, rendering the victim indistinguishable from one who has died (decent healthcare is somewhat lacking in that neck of the woods). The victim is then buried and abandoned, giving the bokor opportunity to visit the grave and dig up his newly-acquired slave. The detached, dreamlike state often associated with zombies is a result of the *datura* plant, which shares certain properties with cocaine-related alkaloids. The combination of drugs renders the zombie helpless and without self-control, allowing the bokor to put him to work performing simple manual tasks. It is often suggested that such a theory breaks the idea that zombies feast on the flesh of the living, or indeed any flesh. According to legend, if a zombie tastes either salt or meat, it will awaken from its undead spell.

There are a number of tales of famous voodoo practitioners who have used zombie slaves to their advantage. Papa Doc Duvalier, dictator of Haiti from 1957 to 1971, was said to have a private army made up entirely of zombies, known as *Tonton Macoutes*. Duvalier was a devout voodooist and leader of a large voodoo church in Haiti. Another case in the country is of a man named Caesar who reportedly died, only to return 18 years later to marry, father three children and die again 30 years after his first burial. One legend tells of a young student in Port-au-Prince who died after a botched robbery. He returned six months later to tell of a bokor who broke into the ambulance where he lay dying from a gunshot wound, to poison him and steal his body. While he was able to speak of his attempted murder initially, as time went on the man grew increasingly lethargic and eventually died. **NAG**

QUICK TIP #7

Limber up: If the film *Zombieland* taught us anything, it's that pulling a muscle while escaping from the zombie hordes is a bad idea. Make sure you stay limber, agile and pain-free during any possibly dangerous outing during the zombie apocalypse.

QUICK TIP #8

The crazies: Any apocalypse is sure to send even the sanest people into a spiral of loathing and madness. Hey, it's a stressful time for everyone. Stay safe and make sure you keep away from anyone exhibiting signs of zombie-induced psychosis.

QUICK TIP #9

If you can't beat 'em: Then burn em. A cleansing inferno is sure to take care of even the toughest hordes. Homemade flamethrowers and napalm launchers are great, but even a simple Molotov cocktail will thin out the rampaging undead.

And so we say goodbye to all things Zombie...

io-Interactive

eidos

SQUARE ENIX.

REAL HAS NO OPTIONS

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PS3

PlayStation 3



XBOX 360.

XBOX
LIVE

KANE &
LYNCH 2
DOG DAYS 伏天



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The ASUS Bamboo U53 is, as the name suggests, constructed partially out of wood.

Designs on the market

ASUS prepares to conquer every notebook segment there is

THERE'S NO GOOD REASON for notebooks to have inferior audio" was the strongest message sent out from ASUS during a recent product launch. There, the company demoed a number of upcoming and currently available notebooks ranging from the tiniest little netbook to their high-end monsters.

There to steal the show was the gorgeous NX90. Packing top-end specs like a Core i7 processor, 18.4" full HD display powered by an NVIDIA GeForce GT 335M and 12GB DDR3 RAM, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the NX90 is out to compete with the likes of Alienware and Qosmio. In truth, it's out to outdo them. When shut, the notebook looks like a piece of art with its perfectly polished aluminium surface and dominant posture. When it's open, you're greeted by twin touch pads and a top half larger than the lower to accommodate the powerful speakers that really set the NX90 apart from its competition. These speakers feature a 15W amplifier and cylindrical sound-tunnel design to get the most out of the limited space available on a notebook.

ASUS also had a chance to show off the latest in their Bamboo range of notebooks designed to appeal to those of us interested in saving the environment without sacrificing

our addiction to technology. The headlining U53 features all you'd need from a mid-range gaming notebook: 15.6" display, Core i5-430M processor, and NVIDIA Optimus technology that pairs a GeForce 310M with a more power-efficient Intel GMA 4500MHD. The real catch with this notebook is the materials used in its construction. Judging by its name, you might assume that to be bamboo, and you're correct. Up to 15% of the device's outer plastic shell has been replaced with bamboo, which is a sustainable, low-impact material that can grow to full maturity within five years. On top of that, much of the packaging you'll likely just throw away when you buy the device is made from reclaimed bamboo pulp. Is it time you started thinking green, yet?



Toshiba shows off its arty side

AS THE GAMING AND technology industry gears up for the impending Christmas madness, hardware manufacturers are doing their best to ensure their products stand out from the crowd. Toshiba has an interesting approach to this idea, and recently held a media event to show off some of their fantastic new products, but dressed the whole event up as an art gallery. Each item in their massive range of upcoming devices was represented as a piece of artwork distinctive of a particular movement in history. Best of all, each piece of art was actually painted in huge scale, although we were only able to have a look at the prints (shipping costs, we were told). There was Jackson Pollock, Piet Mondrian, Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh and even Roy Lichtenstein. Obviously none of them were originals, but it was a cool way to represent new products and got the event off to a great start.

Anyway, let's have a look at exactly what Toshiba has lined up for the coming months.

The Libretto W100 is a netbook in form, but that's about where it ends. It features two 7" multi-touch screens, no physical keyboard and accessibility options including GPS, 3G and wi-fi. Running a Pentium U5400 at 1.2GHz, 2GB of DDR3 RAM and a 64GB SSD, this little guy is sure to perform as well as it'll look. Perfect for those looking for an iPad alternative.

The Portégé R700 continues this popular range of small notebooks with great specs and its signature small size, using a 13.3" screen that's perfectly suited for those who need a notebook's functionality without lugging around a 5kg beast.

To take on the ever-growing netbook market, the Toshiba AC100 is a tiny, light (starting from 870g) device running Google's Android OS on an NVIDIA Tegra 1GHz processor. It's ideally suited for people looking for something even smaller than a netbook, and has a strong focus on cloud computing and remote storage, although it does feature a 32GB SSD to give you local access to the data most important to you, as well as a bit of speed.

In addition, Toshiba showed off some fancy new home entertainment devices like their new STOR.E media player and a few variations. There were a couple of camcorders on display as well, including the Camileo BW10 with HD recording that's waterproof up to 2m deep. Toshiba also showed off a couple of portable hard drives, the most notable of which was a tiny little 1.8" device that features an impressive 5 year warranty – something that competitors Seagate shied away from a couple of years ago.

Toshiba Libretto W100: from R11,999 | **Toshiba AC100:** from R3,999
Toshiba Portege R700: from R12,999

"Water cooling is desirable for its quiet operation and long-term reliability. We are bringing HyperX H2O to market as a solution for PC enthusiasts who want to build water-cooled systems using high quality Kingston products."

Mark Tekunoff, Senior Technology Manager, Kingston. Kingston recently announced three new flavours of water-cooled DDR3 memory modules that will help keep the temperatures down while users try to squeeze even more performance from their machines. The units will support Intel's Extreme Memory Profiles.

Know Your Technology

HDMI: (High-Definition Multimedia interface) an audio/video interface used for transmitting uncompressed digital data found on most digital media devices. The standard was introduced as a replacement for other digital interfaces, but mostly analogue mediums such as coaxial, component video and RF. HDMI has had several revisions since its inception in 2002, and the current 1.3 standard has enough bandwidth to support WQXGA resolutions (2560x1600) and 1600p. Maximum bandwidth supported right now by the standard is 10.2Gbits/sec.

DVI: (Digital Video Interface) initially designed for digital displays such as LCDs and digital projectors. It serves as the immediate successor to the VGA D-Sub interface. It carries uncompressed data like HDMI and is partially compatible in DVI-D mode and VGA compatible in DVI-A analogue mode. The standard doesn't inherently support audio but some modern day graphics cards allow audio to be patched through the DVI interface when an HDMI-DVI converter is being used. A TMDS interface like HDMI, DVI (dual-link) has a maximum bandwidth of 7.92Gbits/sec which

is not as high as HDMI, but does support WQXGA resolutions as well.

DisplayPort: A digital display interface standard created by VESA. The standard is the newest of the three in use on devices today. Unlike HDMI, it is royalty free and is meant as a direct replacement for DVI. It's a TMDS interface as well but has the highest bandwidth of the three supporting up to 17.28Gbits/sec. While the standard was intended to compliment HDMI, it supports HDCP as well including the ability to carry uncompressed digital audio and data. As a result it currently serves more as an alternative to HDMI than the intended replacement.

VESA: (Video Electronics Standards Association) an international standards body for computer graphics started in 1989. The intention of the standards body was to standardize 800x600 SVGA resolutions across graphics controller companies and displays. Since then, VESA has created several standards many of which continue to be used today including but not limited to DDC and E-EDID.

By the Numbers

212.6 million

A new report issued by the non-profit PC Gaming Alliance, the Horizons Hardware Report, claims that PC users that own a rig with a discrete graphics solution total 212.6 million worldwide. That number is predicted to go up to a whopping 322 million by 2014. Asia is still the largest segment for hardware PC gaming shipments with 33 percent, followed by Western Europe with 24 percent, the US with 22 percent and the rest of the world with 21.4 percent.

Hardware Scoring System

- 1 Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.
- 2 Hardware turns on/install but doesn't do much else.
- 3 This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.
- 4 Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.
- 5 Middle of the road product. Performs and works exactly as advertised.
- 6 Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.
- 7 Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.
- 8 Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in the market.
- 9 Excellent product, near perfect.
- 10 The stuff of dreams, the best in the market, bar none.

Hardware Awards



This award can be given for a product that is fast, useful, great value, innovative, first of its kind, etc. It is typically only awarded to a product that scores 7 or higher.



The Dream Machine award isn't always given to the fastest version of any product, but the most versatile, powerful, etc. Only products scoring 9 or 10 get this badge.

The Mosh Pit



KINECT

The controller-free Kinect for the Xbox 360 is set to launch in SA by December. The Kinect sensor recognises you, responds to your gestures, listens to your voice and works with every Xbox 360 console (175 MB of memory required). More than 15 games will be available at launch.

Xbox 360 Kinect Console Bundle: R3,699

Kinect for Xbox: R1,999.99

Kinect Games: R399



GENIUS SW-5.1 1505

This surround 5.1ch speaker system has a total audio output of 47 watts, with a 17 watt subwoofer. The wired remote control can be used to adjust the volume and the bass on the subwoofer. It comes with three sets of RCA cables so you can connect it to your PC for gaming or a DVD player for watching movies.

R699

EXSPECT MULTI-FORMAT HDMI CABLE

Offering up to 1080p visual quality and fast digital data transfer, the multi-format HDMI cable from Exspect offers advanced 1.8 metre (6ft) cable technology, giving the highest quality audio and video signal and high quality AV transmission for any console – Xbox or PS3.

R199.99



SteelSeries moves into Xbox gaming

SteelSeries has introduced a new audio line specifically created for Xbox 360 gamers. The SteelSeries Spectrum 5xb, a premium headset with refined gaming audio designed for both comfort and convenience; the SteelSeries Spectrum 4xb, an entry-level priced headset packed with outstanding sound quality and functionality; and the SteelSeries Spectrum AudioMixer, an accessory that extends Xbox 360 gameplay and communication to any headset with 3.5mm jacks. All the headsets have a retractable, unidirectional microphone.

Hot Water Cooling by IBM

IBM has just installed its first-of-a-kind hot water-cooled supercomputer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich). The system, called Aquasar, consumes up to 40 percent less energy than an air-cooled machine and, through the direct utilisation of waste heat in the building's heating system, results in an 85 percent cut in carbon dioxide emissions. Micro-channel liquid coolers have been attached directly to processors and some components within the server and they are then cooled with warm water (up to 60°C).

Did you know?

A recent report by Parks Associates states that the average consumer household will see its digital media storage needs grow to nearly 900GB by year-end 2014, driven in large part by video downloads, managed copies of Blu-ray Disc, and increasing use of DVR recording capabilities.



The Dream Machine



The Aliens have landed

I T'S TAKEN A LONG time for Alienware to make its way down to the tip of Africa, but it's been well worth the wait. The M17x that we got in for review is a beast of note, and doesn't disappoint when it comes to gaming. It costs a wack of cash, but is well-deserving of its spot on this page.

On a completely unrelated note, here are some signs that you're playing too much *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*:

- You grab your boss's briefcase, open it for five seconds, throw it out the window and say "bomb defused".
- You jump off of a 10-story building because you have commando pro.
- You duct tape a GPS device to the side of your paintball gun and start looking for enemies.
- You yell "WE'VE BEEN EMP-ED! ELECTRONICS ARE OFFLINE" whenever the power goes out.

The Damage...

COMPONENT	PRICE*
CASE	R3,999
PROCESSOR	R10,950
MOTHERBOARD	R7,999
MEMORY	R1,399
GRAPHICS	R13,999
STORAGE	R2,857
SOUND	R1,763
POWER	R4,200
DISPLAY	R3,499
HEADPHONES	R1,316
KEYBOARD	R2,001
MOUSE	R1,076
TOTAL	R55,058

* At print time

NOTEBOOK NEW!

Alienware M17x

R29,999 | www.dell.co.za

System Specs:

CPU: Intel Core i7 720QM (2.8GHz)
RAM: 8GB DDR3 1066
Graphics: 2 x ATI Mobility RADEON HD4870 CFX
Display: 17-inch LCD (1920x1200)
HDD: 320GB SATA2
OS: Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit



PROCESSOR

Intel Core i7 980X
www.intel.com



MOTHERBOARD

GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD9
www.gigabyte.com



MEMORY

OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3
www.ocztechnology.com



GRAPHICS

ASUS ARES Limited Edition
za.asus.com



STORAGE

Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB
www.seagate.com



SOUND

ASUS Xonar Essence ST *
za.asus.com

* Does not work with Logitech G35 headphones



POWER

IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W
www.ikonik.com



CASE

IKONIK Ra X10 LIQUID
www.ikonik.com



DISPLAY

Samsung P2770HD
www.samsung.co.za



HEADPHONES

Logitech G35 Surround Sound *
www.logitech.com



KEYBOARD

Logitech G19
www.logitech.com



MOUSE

Logitech G9x Laser
www.logitech.com

* Does not work with ASUS Xonar Essence ST

Tech Q&A

PC FREEZE

From: Benjamin Loggenberg

"HEY NEO AND ALL the awesome people at NAG! Thanks for the awesome mag! I got a problem and I think it might be because of my graphics card that is overheating, and I really hope you can help me! I mostly play Call of Duty 4 and I run a clan etc etc...At the moment it is the only game installed because of my hard drive that has been formatted , so I only have installed cod4 again! Now ... the problem! Every time I play cod4 about 20-30 minutes the pc freezes but you can still sometimes hear the games sound! Just sometimes! Then I have to re-boot my pc and go on again... it's really really irritating especially when I play clan matches. I hope you can give me advice before I crack! And lastly, I run a 7600 GS graphics card.. Hope you can help! O and August is my birthday month! So if this could come in the magazine of next month it will make my birthday!"

Neo: Update your graphics card driver and if that doesn't sort it out, check to see if there's dust on your VGA cooler, as that may be causing the graphics card to heat up. If cleaning it doesn't work, try remounting the cooler and that should sort it out. That's about all we can help with without having more information.

NAG: Happy Birthday for August dude! Sorry we couldn't get your letter into the right issue :)

WHICH ONE

From: Xander Lubbe

"I'M LOOKING TO BUY a new PC and I'm struggling to decide between an ATI Radeon HD5870 1GB DDR5 dx11 or a 2x ATI Radeon HD5770 1Gb DDR5 graphic xfire mode. I'm running a GIGABYTE P55 GA P55a Udp4 lga 1156. I'm just wondering which one won't get outdated too fast and which is a better buy for the long term?"

Neo: It's always easier to buy just one graphics card. Rather buy the single Radeon 5870 instead of the Crossfire 5770 cards. Crossfire is superb these days but there are still some issues with Crossfire performance scaling in the odd game. This will never be an issue with a single Radeon 5870.

CONNECTING A PS3 AND A PC WITH THE SAMSUNG P2770HD

From: Niel du Plessis

"I, FIRST OF ALL have I to compliment you guys on an awesome magazine, just read the latest issue and it was legendary as always. I have a few questions so bare with me. (None of the sales people at Incredibe Connection, Game, and Top CD were able to help me) Next year I will be going to Tukkies. I have been thinking (and saving up) for a very long time now and have decided that it's time to get myself a PS3 whoohoo.

I plan on buying a bigger screen as well. I have been looking at your Dream Screen, the Samsung P2770HD. Now first of all can u tell me if there is difference between the P2770HD and the P2770?



The 2770HD has a TV tuner, while the 2770H doesn't. Both have DVI, D-Sub and HDMI inputs, though.

(This (the P2770H) is the one they are selling at Incredibe Connection) If there is a big difference, and you say the P2770HD is a lot better, where would I be able to buy it? What other screens would you suggest, that is smaller than a 32" and not a lot more expensive? One of the big things is that I don't want to buy a bigger screen than a 27"; the reason is that it is too expensive, it is too big for my table and I still need to use my PC (You can't use a 32" screen to work on for 3-4 hours, I am pretty sure that your eyes will explode, sitting so close to such a big screen for that period of time. Do u know if you can connect your PC and your PS3 (with the HDMI cable) simultaneously with the P2770HD? (I plan on using just the normal VGA cable from my PC to the screen). And do u get a HDMI cable with your PS3 when you buy it? Will the PS3 be able to work (at full resolution) with this screen? Like I said I don't want to buy a bigger screen such as a Sony Bravia Hull HD 32" for example. If you compare the Samsung P2770HD with the Sony, when connecting your PS3 will the Sony be a "better" (features, image quality etc) screen except for it being a bigger screen. I know both screens have a Full HD resolution. I'm not an expert and I don't know if there is a difference between a Samsung PC monitor and a Sony TV Screen?

Thanks for your time; I really hope to hear from you soon.
Keep up the good work with the greatest magazine of all time."

Neo: The 2770H does not have a TV tuner built in, but otherwise it's the exact same monitor as the 2770HD. If you're not planning on watching broadcast TV then go for the 2770H. Unfortunately, the PS3 doesn't come with an HDMI cable. As for the quality of the screens, that's something we can't answer, it'll be up to

»

If you'd like our tech guru, Neo, to answer your hardware questions, send a mail to lauran@nag.co.za. There aren't any prizes for the letters we print, just simple and honest advice (that is, if we can even decipher the garbled e-mail we sometimes get).

you, but you'll be hard pressed to find a better quality 27-inch monitor than the 2770H for a similar price. In regards to being able to play full HD, yes you'll be able to do so with the screen and connect your PC and console to it at the same time.

HELP

From: Alec

"DEAR GRAND MASTERS OF gaming. I was wondering if you could please tell me the names of some good graphics cards that won't cost me so much that I would have to go and sell my body at the harbour. Yours in computer stoopidity."

Neo: Buy a GTX460 or a Radeon 5850, brand is unimportant.

LETTER FROM NAG TO TROJAN

Dear Trojan

Thank you so much for all your helpful suggestions on how we can improve the quality of NAG and also make rAge a much better experience just for you. We have transcribed all the notes we made while chatting to you the other day, and have listed them in point format on our giant white board in the office, under a heading marked Important Things To Do Before We Die. Rest assured your input has become our number one focus, and we will not rest until every last item has been addressed and implemented.

And thank you so much for being our most loyal reader. We really do appreciate the fact that your stack of NAG Magazines is much higher than your pile of PC Formats.

Please do continue to send us your feedback, as it is really very constructive and may even revolutionise the way we do things around here.

Kind regards
Lauren

NAG

MSI GT660

LOOK OVER HERE

Visuals are displayed in all their glory on the 16-inch TFT LCD (LED backlit) screen. Previous models in MSI's GT range had problems with screen brightness, in that the screens just weren't bright enough for our liking. Based on our brief time with the GT660, however, it seems the problem has been rectified, displaying all its vivid, crisp visuals with no brightness hiccups.

STYLED

If you're into lots of flashy lights, then you'll love the look of the GT660. With LEDs strewn all over the place (which can be turned on and off, or set to slowly pulsate when the laptop is in sleep mode) and a design based on the hood of a supercar, just looking at the GT660 should be more than enough to get your friends jealous. The control panel above the keyboard has one-touch access to power-saving modes, the Turbo mode and an advanced cooling setting that can be turned on/off at will. It also does light shows. Press a button and the Audio Synchronize Mode turns on, making your LEDs flash and pulse in time with your tunes.



AUDIBLE PRECISION

Possibly the most impressive feature you'll encounter upon unboxing your shiny new GT660 is the superb sound quality. MSI worked together with Dynaudio to build high-quality speakers that have now been dumped in amongst the 660's innards. The creators spent many sleepless nights studying and calculating the optimal location to place the speakers (of which there are two, with a subwoofer to make the audio meatier) for the best possible audio experience, totally free of obstruction from the other hardware packed into the notebook. 1,200 hours were supposedly spent testing every possible frequency, tweaking and tuning to obtain the perfect output. There's no other way to put it: for a notebook, the result is astounding.

WHAT'S IN IT?

Based on the PM55 chipset, the GT660 we reviewed arrived sporting an Intel Core i7-720QM quad-core (at 1.6GHz per core) processor. An NVIDIA GTX 285M (1GB GDDR3) provides the visuals, backed up by 6GB of DDRIII RAM to ensure you'll never spend days trapped on loading screens. Two 500GB hard drives make for plenty of storage space, while all the usual extras like card readers, an HD webcam, and all the standard I/O ports you'll need are built in. You've also got two USB 3.0 ports in addition to regular old 2.0 ports. There's no Blu-ray drive, however, so if you're looking for a laptop with Blu-ray support, look elsewhere. As is customary with the GT series, the 660 also comes bundled with a handy backpack (useful for carting your laptop off to LANs) and a decent gaming mouse.

TURBOCHARGED

The GT660 is the world's first notebook to come with TDE+ (Turbo Drive Engine+) technology. Its purpose is to squeeze more power out of the processor, memory and GPU at the touch of a button. If you find that your gigantic force of Zealots, Void Rays and Stalkers battling against your opponent's massive Terran army is taking its toll on your flashy laptop's performance and pushing it beyond what you thought were its limits, simply hit the Turbo button on the control panel above the keyboard to juice things up a bit.

Specifications

CPU: Intel Core i7 720QM
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce GTX 285M (1GB GDDR3)
RAM: 3 x 2GB DDRIII 1066
Display: 16-inch TFT-LCD (LED backlight)
HDD: 2 x 500GB 7200RPM drives
Audio: 2 x theatre speakers, 1 x subwoofer (Dynaudio Premium Sound speakers)
OS: Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit

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A PERMANENT INTERNET CONNECTION IS REQUIRED TO PLAY THE PC VERSION OF THE GAME.





hardwired

By Neo Sibeko

Like it or not, 3D is here for good

DEPTH PERCEPTION IS PROBABLY the single biggest reason why graphics and, to some degree, audio technology advances have progressed at such a staggering pace. Even where audio is concerned, the shift from a mono signal to stereo signified a massive shift in the equipment consumers were buying, what manufacturers were making, and how we perceived our music and movies.

It's probably true that there were some individuals who maintained that a mono signal was better for various reasons, but today that isn't even an argument. In fact, you'll be hard pressed to find any device that does not support stereo output that plays music, video or both.

When stereo became the main way in which audio was perceived for most people, interesting advancements took place at the same time which enriched the experience over and above that of just having an additional audio channel. The audio equipment and all other associated technologies improved as well. That is, recording equipment became better, playback apparatus improved, and the listener as well had a new level of appreciation for their music/movies.

With the advent of quadraphonic sound in the consumer space of the 70s, the buying public was introduced to the idea of surround sound. If there were people who opposed the shift from mono to stereo, one can imagine that even more felt that quadraphonic sound was a gimmick and a waste of time. After all, you only have two ears, and a perfectly balanced and configured stereo system can deliver an experience near identical to being at an actual event.

Today however, it's hard to find (yet again) any electronic media player that does not support some form of surround or audio signal manipulation that simulates the experience of having four or more speakers. Surely this points to some appreciation by end users for the once thought to be useless surround sound phenomenon (if you can even call it that). As it happened before, when we moved from stereo to 5.1 "surround-sound" and more, the equipment used to record that many channels and the devices used to then play back such recordings improved. Audiophiles may disagree, but it's without a doubt that the average home theatre component systems today sound significantly better than what were available 10 to 20 years ago in a significantly more expensive setup. While the move to multiple channel audio is not as significant as the move was from mono to stereo, it did add another dimension to our experience, and it is something we have grown used too.

One can imagine going to a movie theatre that is only equipped with stereo equipment. One is likely

to recall a less than optimal audio experience even though in a full THX certified cinema you may not take note of the audio at all. In a way, it's because you don't notice it in a state of the art theatre, that you know it's important. We take it for granted and it's expected.

This in a way is similar to what we are experiencing with the rise and more than aggressive marketing of all things 3D. While there have been many attempts before to bring 3D to the forefront of our visual experiences, all these previous attempts have failed for various reasons, the biggest one

"For the same reason that stereo added a new dimension to how we perceive audio, the addition of depth to our image will eventually revolutionise the way we view and interact with our displays and the media that we watch on them."

being the limited technology that was available. While passive systems can work sometimes, for the most part they are a throwback to years gone by where the technology never took off.

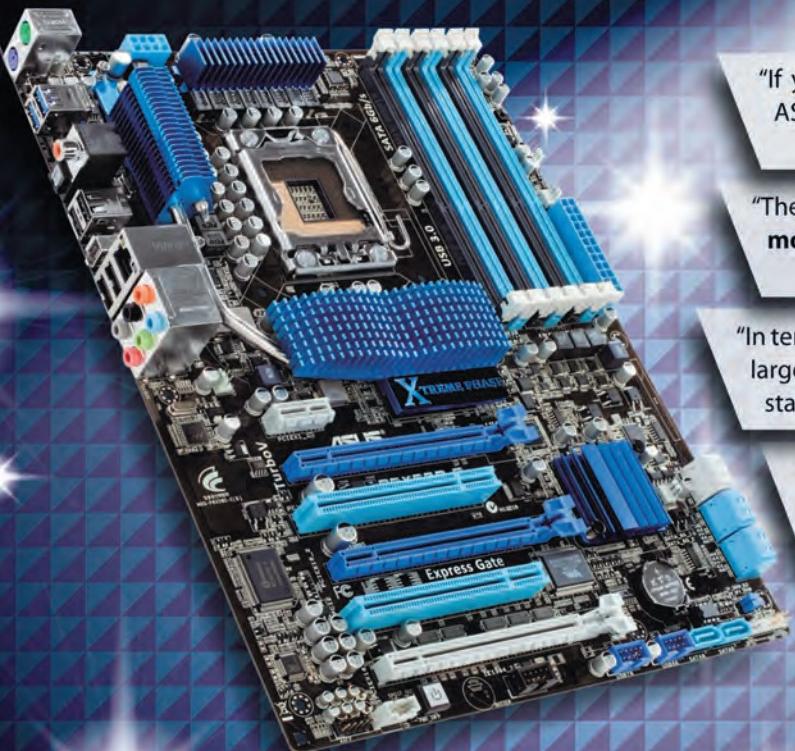
However, that is not to say 3D as a technology has no place; in fact it's the exact opposite. For the same reason that stereo added a new dimension to how we perceive audio, the addition of depth to our image will eventually revolutionise the way we view and interact with our displays and the media that we watch on them.

Active 3D systems are evidence of this. They are not perfect right now (especially since many 3D TV's that use shutter glasses do not allow you to adjust depth), but on the computing front it's at a point where it's starting to become a sought after feature. There is plenty of room for improvement on all mediums, however unlike any other time before, it's working well enough to make it a worthwhile technology to pursue for manufacturers and consumers.

Our audio experiences have depth and we take that for granted, and this too shall be the case with our displays. So it may not be perfect right now (sometimes downright appalling as shown by some movies of late) but it will eventually get to a point where it's noted when it's absent rather than when it's present. **NAG**

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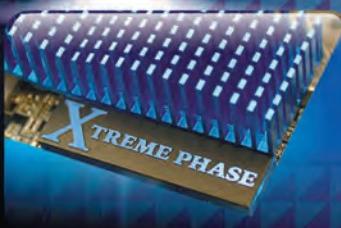
- US_Pureoverclock.com_2010.07.06

"In conclusion, the ASUS P6X58D-E demonstrated that it delivers system performance as good or **better** than competing X58-Express solutions"

- US_Benchmarkreviews.com_2010.06.16

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- Germany_Hartware.de_2010.05.17



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Life, Hardware and Cheaps

By Derrick Cramer

rAge Hardware Protips

AS I WRITE THIS, tickets to this year's NAG LAN @ rAge have just gone on sale. The credit card transaction has gone through successfully, and tomorrow I'll be picking up the four pieces of paper that represent what will most likely sell out in under two days. [It took one day, Ed] With this done, my attention is turned to hardware, and why my plan for this year's LAN needs some revision.

According to the FAQ on the NAG online forums, I won't be able to bring my 26" Samsung T260 to this event, as it takes up too much space. That's an inconvenience for me, but a potential nightmare to others. What if the only monitor you own is 26 inches or larger? Must you resort to buying another screen just to go to a LAN event? I understand the space concerns and the point of view those who made this decision have, but in my opinion it's a fairly stupid approach. I've managed two 26 inch screens and cases on one trestle table before, so it can be done, but rules are rules. I wonder what the VC crew will think of my 65kg Cooler Master ATCS840?

Moaning aside, this will be my 6th LAN at rAge, and over the years I've worked out a few tips that turn the queuing from a hardware nightmare into something of a fun event for all.

Transport: Padding, screws and wheels!

Taking your baby to any LAN is dangerous, not least when you have to queue for a couple of hours before entering. To ensure your hardware remains safe throughout, start with the basics: screws. Open up your case and make sure all hardware is bolted down firmly. Graphics card, motherboard and CPU cooler are three major areas of concern, so pay special attention here, and if you have plastic clips holding in your DVD drives, supplement them with a screw or two just in case. Next up, the padding. As a rule of thumb you'll be bringing a pillow, sleeping bag or blanket to the event, heck even a jacket will do. Use this strategically to wrap your hardware up. Makes sense really, if you have to lug the stuff around you may as well find a use for it, and what better use than protecting your PC? If you have the boxes for your monitor and case, use them! Transporting something in cardboard and Styrofoam designed for it is common sense, you can save showing off your hardware for when you're inside. Lastly, wheels have been used for centuries to make transporting things easier, so work smarter, not harder. A two or four-wheeled crate trolley works wonders and has ample space for two PCs. When you get to the stairs you each grab a side and lift, simple and effective. Grandma's wheelchair is also effective, so are Pick n

Pay trolley's, although you didn't hear about either from me. Lastly, be smart about the test station at the entrance. You have to test your PC's power supply before you enter the event, to make sure it doesn't trip the power. Make sure both the PSU and your power button are accessible; we don't want you slowing the entry process more than you need too.

Disaster management: Prepare for the worst!

Before you even consider packing for rAge, make sure all of your hardware works. Check, then recheck, and go over it a third time if you feel the need. If your system is giving you grief before hand, attend to the problem, as it won't disappear during the car ride there. Once you start to pack, make a checklist and tick each thing off as you pack it in - you don't want to arrive at rAge with no power cable or mouse. Items that people often forget are: Red power cable/plug, headphones, wireless receivers for wireless equipment and screwdrivers that are compatible with your own hardware - make sure there are all there. Lastly, drivers for all of your hardware. Graphics card, audio and LAN drivers are most important, while you should also bear gaming peripheral drivers in mind. Make sure you have these on a flash drive and not a CD! The benefits of a flash are: The CD can get scratched, and

"Above all, whether in the entrance queue or waiting in a game lobby, be courteous and social. You're surrounded by over 2,000 like-minded people who are there for the same reasons as you, so chat up a storm."

they'll work even if your DVD drive doesn't.

Above all, whether in the entrance queue or waiting in a game lobby, be courteous and social. You're surrounded by over 2,000 like-minded people who are there for the same reasons as you, so chat up a storm. As a final thought, don't rush. There's enough space for everyone to fit and enough time for you to enjoy the gaming to your heart's content, so chill and enjoy. rAge only comes around once a year, so make the most of it! **NAG**

Windows®. Life without Walls™. ASUS recommends Windows.



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Keeping Tabs Bandwidth

Still running a capped broadband account but constantly having to pay more for your last couple of days of each month? Here's our selection of helpful software for you to avoid this pitfall.

THERE ARE STILL A couple of reasons, good reasons, why you might not have migrated to uncapped ADSL yet. One of them, of course, is that you don't get ADSL in your area... and I guess another is performance. Particularly the kind of performance gamers want and need from their network connections.

Because naturally, when you shove more high-end users onto the same-size DSLAM, there are going to be both latency and throughput issues. And a capped 512K still costs less than an uncapped 384K for an adequate number of gigabytes.

But unless you're running iBurst with the R99 iGamer subscription and then only connect to these game servers, bandwidth continues to be important to you. Monitoring and controlling your bandwidth usage so you can get the maximum gaming time from your Web connection without spilling over into the addictive top-ups becomes the issue.

There are a plethora of tools - some free - that you can get a hold of to help you out. Here's a snapshot of what we found, so you can avoid the silly ones yourself

and, therefore, wasted bandwidth.

THE FREEBIES

There are two really good free bandwidth monitors out there. There's BitMeter [codebox.org.uk/pages/bitmeter2/] from Codebox, and NetMeter [www.hootech.com/NetMeter/] by Oliver Winterholler. They are very closely related in every way.

Both are very good watchmen of your overall bandwidth consumption. Although running simultaneously while monitoring some raw uncapped data throughput, they didn't always agree with one another, but the results are close enough, and definitely represent a fair look at how hard you're pumping that data. Both represent the data well too: BitMeter's Windows 7-friendly opacity is slicker, the NetMeter data window easier to read and interpret.

Both apps also log the network data very effectively, grouping uploads and downloads separately by hour, day, week, etc. The BitMeter data is a bit harder to get to: you first have to go to a pretty-but-unintelligible graph and then click through to the statistics as readable

data. With NetMeter, you just right-click, choose totals, and you get average upload, download, and combined throughput and precise breakdowns of your total bandwidth usage.

There's one more feature both free tools have which is nice: both have the ability to provide you with warnings at specified bandwidth usage levels. In this instance, BitMeter is better. The option is more self-explanatory (ISP Restrictions) and more clearly laid out overall.

They're free, very good, and very similar. The choice will come down to personal preference.

But before moving on, we have to point out that the "new" BitMeter, called BitMeterOS, is pretty useless. Rather just grab BitMeter 2 - it's entirely free.

And finally, we mistakenly thought that a program called NetWorx, also freeware, was going to serve our purposes. It technically could, but it's a bit more of a network Swiss-Army app than a lightweight background bandwidth monitor. It also does notifications, but counts all network traffic when pointed at the Eth0 interface,

Monitors

so unless you're still on a dial-up which it counts as a separate connection, NetWorx will report that your NIC is handling 1000 GB (yes, 1 TB) a day give or take. Clearly, it hasn't been updated in a while.

But if these are the free ones, how useful must the commercial products be?

THE COMMERCIALS

We grabbed Bandwidth Meter [www.bandwidth-meter.net] by Wizard Software, Bandwidth Monitor Pro [www.bandwidthmonitorpro.com] and Bandwidth Monitor 2 [www.rokario.com] both from Rokario, one called NBMonitor [www.nbmonitor.com] by NSASoft, and SoftPerfect's Bandwidth Manager [www.softperfect.com/products/bandwidth/].

Firstly, a few of these require that plugins requiring a restart be installed, and it's always a danger putting strange virtual network devices into vital sections of your network stack. And then, pretty much en masse, they just didn't at all do what they should, despite custom network protocols and strings making a mess of your network centre.

Bandwidth Monitor Pro doesn't capture any data at all. Bandwidth Meter, also nothing. No LAN, WAN, WLAN, or even PAN traffic is counted. Bandwidth Monitor 2 is a bit better with an unintelligible widget display and elementary, but at least useful, total usage log, but that's really all it offers.

NBMonitor is a resource beast, and isn't so much a bandwidth monitor as a software packet analyser, and a pretty unstable one at that, regularly crashing to desktop under the flood of network packets it was trying to keep pace with. And Bandwidth Manager? Well it just refused to run on Windows 7 at all.

WHAT ELSE?

You're probably better off just using the built-in Statistics Tracker in Vuze than these tools if you're a heavy torrenter, which on a capped line you most probably aren't. Or you could just rely on your ISP to alert you at the prescribed usage indicators, which most of them are pretty good at doing anyway.

There are even more robust ways of achieving these same goals, of course.

A good managed router with integrated monitoring, for instance, would be nice, and a very precise solution measuring every bit being passed across your WAN link, regardless of how many LAN connections your network has, but not everyone has these devices plugged into their DSL lines. They're hardly the standard home-user or gamer fair, unless you happen to be gaming from the IS backbone.

If you're looking for decent bandwidth management software that works well under Windows 7, get either one of the free ones, BitMeter or NetMeter. I prefer NetMeter ever so slightly, without really being able to put my finger on why, exactly. At the end of the day, both monitor well and present their findings well, and both will alert you when you're getting close to your dreaded cap. And neither will cost you a cent.

Or, of course, you could just deal with the occasional disconnect and join the uncapped revolution. Come on, it's always holidays on this side of the digital divide, and money is always free!

NAG
Russell Bennett

DIY: Hands-on with Dremel

Part 7: Desktop speaker mod

CONFESION TIME: OUR PROGRESS on the ultimate *Guitar Hero* mod has been indefinitely put on hold. During some seemingly-harmless voltage testing, I accidentally short-circuited something important. The result was a burnt smell, overheating components and one *Guitar Hero* controller short of a continuation of last month's mod. Fear not; if ever I can bring it back to life we can continue to work on it, but until such time swings around, let's get stuck into a few other cool ideas.

This month, we're going to perform a relatively simple but interesting mod: changing the look of a pair of PC speakers (belonging to a Logitech X230, but you can use any speakers – even those from a home theatre system). The nice thing about this mod, depending on which speakers you're going to use, is there is no chance of interfering with the electrical workings inside. You may not even need to open your speakers at all.

STEP 1: PREPARATION

In my situation, I was able to remove the entire grill/facade as it's a single piece. Simply give it a tug and it'll come loose from the body of the unit, exposing the speakers themselves. I'm going for a grill-less look here, so I removed the mesh sheeting by simply snipping it a few times and tearing it off. If necessary, also remove the facade covering the control panel if you wish. Set the facades aside for now, and cut out suitable pieces of Perspex which we're going to use to cover each one. Mask up both sides of your Perspex pieces and draw a template for cutting out. If your speakers, like mine, aren't entirely flat, you'll need to take its total surface area into account.

STEP 2: CUTTING

Using your Dremel rotary tool and a PVC cutting disc, cut out each piece of Perspex, including holes for the speakers. When you're done with that, fit a sanding drum to the Dremel and neaten up the edges. You may also need to cut holes for the volume/power button and any other controls, depending on what your speakers look like. I suggest using a drill to rough out the necessary holes, then a conical grinding stone and/or sanding drum to neaten the edges. When you're done, manually sand the edges using a combination of 200 and 400 grit, then finish off with a piece from the 1200.

STEP 3: SHAPING THE PERSPEX

This step is optional, depending on your speakers, but regardless it's a neat trick that you could use for any purpose. Because of the non-flat profile of my speaker facades, I'll need to curve the Perspex to line up. To do this, clamp down your Perspex, just before where you want the bend to occur, at the edge of a work surface. Remove the masking tape from the area you're going to work on. Use a heat gun on a low setting, or in this case a Dremel Versatip without any attachment, and pass the heat along the area of the Perspex that you'd like to bend. Keep it about a centimetre away from the Perspex, and alternate your heat between the top and underside. Soon enough, you'll be able to apply pressure with your free hand to gently lift the Perspex, thus bending it at the heated point. Hold it in place for a few seconds while it hardens, and when it does, it'll be as tough as it ever was.

STEP 4: DRILLING

When your Perspex pieces look like they'll fit onto your speaker facades, line them up and use a little masking tape to hold them in place. Stick more masking tape over the areas where you'd like to drill them in place, to prevent any accidental scratching of the Perspex. Select a drill bit slightly smaller than the screws you're using, and drill through both the Perspex and facade beneath. Now lift the Perspex off. Depending on your personal preference, you could either screw the Perspex directly onto the facade, or elevate it above slightly using a few washers. You may also need to elevate the screws otherwise they'll poke through the facade too far and prevent you from installing it back on to the speaker unit. If you're happy to leave your speakers the colour that they are, then you're done; simply screw the Perspex into place, and re-attach your new facades to the speakers.

STEP 5: PAINTING

You may want to give the facades a bit of a paint-job as well, while you're at it. I (rather short-sightedly) selected a gun-metal grey colour for mine that looks pretty much identical to the original colour, but perhaps you could choose a brighter colour, or anything, really. Before you screw the Perspex into place, thoroughly wash and dry the facades. Give them two coats of colour, using the 1200 grit sandpaper to lightly wet-sand before the second coat. Then apply the same technique using the high-gloss clear coat spray. Using the clear coat will help enhance the glossy appearance given by the Perspex and will protect the paint underneath from any undesirable scratches. **NAG**

What you will need

- Dremel rotary tool. I'm using the new and absolutely brilliant Dremel 4000
- Accessories: PVC cutting disc; a sanding drum with one or two belts; (optional) grinding stone (Alu Oxide Grinding Stone, 953); drill bit
- (Optional) Heat gun. I'm using the Dremel Versatip
- Screwdriver (flat or Philips is dependent on your choice of screws)
- Self-tapping screws and washers
- Sheet of Perspex
- Masking tape
- Pen or pencil
- Two adjustable clamps
- Elevated working surface
- Safety goggles
- (Optional) Spray paint in any colour and clear coat spray
- Sandpaper (200, 400 and 1200 grit)



Geoff Burrows



Tips from the experts



Buffing and polishing: Dremel offers a wide range of accessories for sanding, buffing and polishing surfaces of various materials. Independent of the material you work with, you will always go from rough to fine. The first step is to remove all sorts of varnish, paint or coatings. Use sanding papers or sanding bands first. Finer sanding can be done by using abrasive buffs. For light deburring you can even use certain wire brushes. Make sure that you have smoothed the surface you want to polish. The smoother/finer, the better the finish. For polishing you can get already impregnated polishing wheels (Dremel offers model 520 for various surfaces) or normal polishing wheels or pads. The polishing compound you want to use is determined by the material you want to polish. So make sure that you get the correct compound if you, for example, want to work on Perspex.

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Alienware M17x



A LIENWARE WITHOUT QUESTION IS the most sought-after gaming notebook brand there has ever been. As impressive as their desktop systems are, it's what the company does with its notebooks that makes the brand number one in the minds of gamers and power users the world over.

While SA has never had local availability, we now have a formalised distribution channel, and that means we have access to some of the most powerful notebooks the world has ever known. The M17x is one such notebook and make no mistake about it; it is every bit as powerful as it looks.

Before we get into the unit, Alienware, true to their reputation, makes some of the most compelling packages when it comes to their products. It's in these little things that one feels they are really using a top of the line premium notebook. In addition to the unit itself you receive an Alienware Cap, which may not be the most stylish design around but some people would wear with pride. The package also includes a non-slip gaming mouse and an incredibly detailed user manual, fashioned in a leather carrier similar to one you would expect to receive when you buy a supercar.

The notebook is heavy, cumbersome and truly a desktop replacement unit. Despite its girth it looks great. When powered it glows red, making it the most impressive notebook we have seen to date. This impressive presentation is extended to the Alienware Command Centre, which is your one stop shop for configuring your user experience with the unit.

It's not a gimmick as you find in many notebooks, but allows you to configure everything about the notebook, with detailed explanations on what each option does. From here you can configure your

facial recognition login, manage user accounts and much more. One of the most visually appealing features of the unit is the QuickTouch System, which uses touch-capacitive sensors for quick access functionality such as BlueTooth, Wireless LAN, power management, launching the command centre and such.

The hardware, which is where the other half of the magic is contained, is equally impressive as per Alienware standards. The M17x can be configured with various CPUs but the unit we tested featured the popular Core i7 720QM. A capable CPU by all standards, but if you feel you want something more powerful you can opt for the i7 820 or the 920XM.

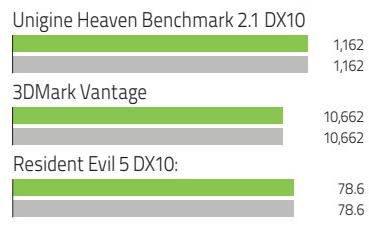
Graphics power, much like the CPU, is impressive and the unit we tested featured two ATI Radeon 4870 graphics processors operating in Crossfire. This makes for some impressive graphics benchmarks, and the game performance is nothing short of incredible. There's an option for a single Mobility Radeon 5870, but we would steer clear of this solution despite it looking better on paper. This is because the Mobility Radeon 5870 is actually the equivalent of the Radeon 5770. Given the narrow memory bus of this GPU, the full-HD screen would tax it when playing games at the native resolution (1920x1200) and result in rather disappointing frame rates. The Crossfire 4870 option is much better, and it's responsible for the high 3DMark Vantage score.

There's a lot more to this notebook than we have space to cover as it's loaded with features that make the notebook a cut above anything else we have ever tested. Despite the lack of 3D support (not Alienware's fault really) we would be willing to forgo that

Specifications

CPU: Intel Core i7 720QM (2.8GHz)
RAM: 8GB DDR3 1066
Graphics: 2 x ATI Mobility RADEON HD4870 CFX
Display: 17-inch LCD (1920x1200)

Benchmarks



feature because of the compelling package that is the M17x.

There are plenty of gaming notebooks on the market, some more powerful than this unit, but none deliver the complete package that the M17x does, and as such we have to award this unit our Dream Machine Notebook award as it's thoroughly deserved. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

- >**Plus**
 - + Performance
 - + Build quality
 - + Aesthetics

- >**Minus**
 - Size

Bottom Line

The best notebook we have tested, and certainly the best money can buy locally.

09
out of ten

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The XtreamerPro multimedia player is based on the same platform as the highly successful Xtreamer. Additionally it offers up to 4 TB storage, double the memory and ultra fast eSATA speed. Experience the impressive, artistic GUI on your TV screen by using your iPhone or the included remote control to navigate through your entertainment choices using crisp, animated HD menus.



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Evetech Intel Core i5 Overclocked GTX 470 Gaming PC

THIS MONTH WE HAVE a custom built gaming PC from Evetech up for review, the second unit they have sent us. The first unit reviewed a few months back showed promise, but was lacking overall polish. Well, the guys over at Evetech got a bottle of polish out alright, and it's resulted in possibly the best pre-built system we've ever seen. Read on to find out how close to perfection Evetech have come.

Before we go any further, you should note that you can fully customise an Evetech PC to your heart's content on their website prior to placing your final order. The one we have for review is a pre-configured system found on their site, consisting of an Intel i5 750CPU, a GIGABYTE P55-UDP4 motherboard, 2 x 2GB G.Skill high-performance RAM, ASUS GTX470, and a 1TB Western Digital Caviar Black SATA3 drive. See the trend? The system is built out of name parts from highly reputable hardware companies such as ASUS and GIGABYTE, which is a smart move by Evetech. Not only are these parts more expensive (showing that the company is far from skimping on quality), they're also extremely stable and are of the highest quality, perfect for an overclocked system. What this means is you will experience far better performance than the same system running at stock speeds.

Custom-built, overclocked systems have been a long time coming, and Evetech deserve praise for just how well they've implemented this. The i5 750 is running at a healthy 3.6GHz, the BCLK of the board at 200MHz, and the RAM at 1600MHz CL 8-8-8-24, and it's perfectly stable for any use you could imagine. Furthermore, the person in charge of overclocking the system knows what they're doing, and has found the perfect balance between heat, stability and most importantly, performance. The

presence of a high-end air cooler shows Evetech has considered all aspects of selling an overclocked system, and earn them yet more praise.

Onto performance, and the Evetech Core i5 rig does a superb job. 3D Mark 06 gave us a CPU score of 5,675, which is closer to the performance of a standard i7 930 rather than a simple i5 750. The overclocking not only allows the RAM to run at its full speed (near impossible in a stock system), it also removes the processor bottleneck allowing the GTX470 to shine in 3D. Running the Performance Preset in 3D Mark Vantage resulted in a score of P15022, healthy enough to run any DirectX 10 game at max settings with a high resolution. Last but not least, Heaven Benchmark will be used. A DirectX 11 benchmark designed to push the very capable GTX470 resulted in a final score of 1024, far higher than it would've been in the stock system. When it comes to performance, this Evetech rig has all its bases covered.

A high quality, overclocked system sounds great so far, and would you believe things get better? Well we're happy to say, they do. The system is housed in a Cooler Master CM690 II case, which is not only one of the best cases out there in terms of looks and features, but also offers the ability to manage your cables. The reasons for doing this are simple: cable management allows better access to your system, better airflow throughout the case, and a neater look overall. All things considered, while the overclocker of this rig is good, the cable management specialist is even better. By far the neatest cable management job we have ever seen in any system, pre-built or enthusiast regardless, the cable management in this rig is a work of art, only far more useful.

Specifications

CPU:	Intel i5 750
Motherboard:	GIGABYTE P55-UDP4
GPU:	ASUS GTX470
RAM:	2 x 2GB G.Skill Performance RAM
HDD:	Western Digital Black 1TB SATA3
PSU:	Cooler Master GX 650
Cooler:	Zalman CNPS 10X Xtreme
Case:	Cooler Master 690 II
Optical:	DVD Rom
Warranty:	24 months



Benchmarks

Heaven Benchmark 2.1	1,024
	1,024
3DMark Vantage	15,022
	15,022

Baseline: Evetech Core i5 Overclocked GTX470 Gaming PC

All things considered, this Evetech pre-built gaming rig is brilliant. Combining overclocked performance and high-quality parts with near perfect cable management, and adding a well configured operating system as a finishing touch, this system is well worth your money and will find itself in many gamers' homes very soon. We can't recommend this product enough. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Cable management,
- + Overclocked
- + High quality parts

>Minus

- None

>Bottom Line

Worth every cent and more, the best quality pre-built system on the market today, period.

10
out of ten

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Acer GD245HQ



IF YOU DIDN'T BELIEVE it before, you best believe it now. 3D is here to stay, and no matter how many speak out against it, its benefits right now, especially in the context of computing, far outweigh the down sides.

This is especially true because most complaints about the technology are related to the movie-going experience and the passive 3D systems used there (polarised glasses and such), which tend to be a hit-and-miss affair (mostly the latter) for viewing audiences.

Indeed, there are many valid points made by those who oppose everything 3D. However it's important to note that not all 3D experiences are equal. For the same reason the 3D experience while watching Avatar at a state-of-the-art theatre is significantly different from the 3D posters that were all the rage in tabloid magazines in the early 90s, the type of 3D system you're using has everything to do with how you perceive the technology.

Luckily, in the computing sphere we are generally limited to the active-shutter glass 3D, which makes monitors such as the Acer GD245HQ very attractive.

The last 3D monitor that we reviewed was a 22-inch Samsung 2233RZ with a native resolution of 1680x1050 and a dual-link DVI port, a necessity because of the bandwidth requirements. The Acer GD245HQ is better in many ways: it supports a full-HD resolution of 1920x1080, it's 1.6 inches larger, and it features an additional VGA

D-Sub and HDMI input. These may seem like small advantages given the purpose of the monitor, but for these reasons alone it is a more complete product.

This could easily have been our Dream Machine monitor had it not been for the one oversight, which is the lack of any sort of labelling on the buttons. Not only are the buttons located under the monitor, they are without labels on the unit itself, which could be a problem if you want to change sources quickly.

Other than that there isn't much to fault this monitor on. We don't quite understand why it isn't a full 24 inches, and we wonder what happened to the other .4 inches of screen real estate. Still, we are happy about the full-HD resolution and the very high sync rate (120Hz). It's easy to forget how much smoother a jitter-free video is (especially noticeable during scenes that pan), but after spending a few days watching smooth video like that, it's hard to return to a regular LCD panel.

Aesthetically, the Acer unit is better looking than the Samsung 2233RZ we reviewed. The base is an easy clip-on system, and its angle is adjustable, making it customisable to a variety of seating positions, which is imperative when viewing 3D as being significantly offset from the screen can not only cause eye strain, but take away from the depth perception.

Playing all our 3D titles on this unit was painless, despite being a little darker than

Specifications

- Size:** 23.6 inches
- Native Resolution:** 1920x1080
- Refresh Rate:** 120Hz (2ms)
- Inputs:** DVI, VGA, HDMI
- Backlight Technology:** CCFL

the Samsung 2233RZ. Colour reproduction on the unit was average to slightly above average. With some tuning (once again made difficult by the nameless buttons) the image was improved and resulted in a much more vibrant picture that tended to crush the blacks sometimes, but for the most part was much improved.

Overall, the Acer GD245HQ delivers on its promises. It looks good, performs well and, best of all, gives you all this in glorious 3D. If you weren't moved by the Samsung 2233RZ, you should consider this unit as it really is the most impressive 3D monitor we have tested to date. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Multiple inputs
- + Aesthetics
- + Good video playback

>Minus

- Button location
- Unlabelled buttons
- Slightly dark picture

>Bottom Line

One of the better full-HD 3D LCD monitors on the market, and certainly the best from Acer.

08
out of ten

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Samsung Apps



Palit GTX460 768MB

WITH THE RELEASE OF NVIDIA's GTX460, it was inevitable that almost every manufacturer out there would jump at the opportunity to manufacture and sell the new GPU. Given that it's a mid-range part that's already outselling the high-end NVIDIA cards, we can only assume there are going to be a lot more variations of this graphics card to come.

As a result of this much easier to manufacture GPU, NVIDIA, as always, has a reference design which partners are more than welcome to adopt, and that's exactly what Palit has done with their GTX460 768MB card. That means you'll find the typical HDMI port (with full HDCP support), Dual-Link DVI port and a standard analogue VGA D-Sub connector. We appreciate the standard-sized HDMI connector instead of the mini one used on the GTX480/470, which was a pain more than anything else.

The card uses a dual-slot cooler similar to the reference cooler, which works well enough at keeping the temperatures low when idle and manageable under full load. It's worth keeping in mind that the GF104 cards need not be as elaborate as the ones found on the GTX465 and higher. This is simply because the TDP for the 768MB versions is 150W. (*Please note that TDP is recorded as the maximum power used under normal operating conditions. Some synthetic benchmarks may exceed this and result in a higher TDP.*)

This TDP is significantly lower than that of the GTX470/480 which makes it PSU friendly. NVIDIA recommends a 450W PSU, but we're betting that you could get away with a high-quality 400W unit. Despite being significantly less complex to manufacture, the GTX460 still requires two 6-pin PCI-Express power plugs. We have heard and seen preliminary shots of 460 cards using a single connector, but these are based on

completely customised PCBs with a different power layout. (This Palit model uses a 4-phase power delivery system.)

We aren't sure why NVIDIA labelled both cards as GTX460, but the 768MB model and the 1GB model do not only differ in memory capacity but in performance as well, which is unrelated to the amount of memory on each card.

While they both have two GPCs and the exact same number of CUDA Cores (336), the 768MB version comes outfitted with a 192-bit memory controller (3x64-bit) instead of the full 256-bit of the 1GB card. This is what results in the memory configuration of 768MB (256MB per channel) and 1GB for the other model. However, because of the processor configuration as well, the 768MB has fewer render outputs (ROPs) at 24 instead of 32. These are the only differences between the two SKUs, but the performance differences vary from being obvious to negligible depending on the games and synthetic benchmark.

As expected, overclocking the Palit card – much like all other 768MB models – is a little more fruitful than on the 1GB model. For instance, it's not unusual to reach above 925MHz on the 768MB card, however only a few 1GB cards will reach that speed. Whatever the reason for this may be, the Palit card overclocks to highly impressive levels and there's no reason why it cannot operate at 800MHz core clock with no stability issues.

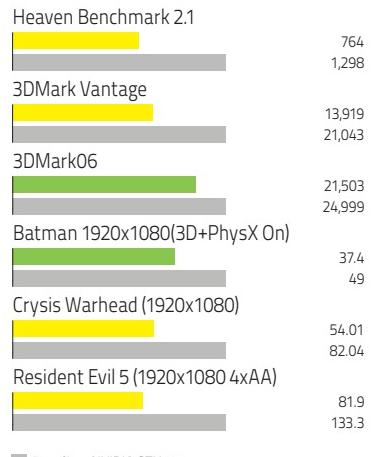
Before tackling core overclocking though, it may be worth keeping in mind that with the relatively narrow memory bit-width, overclocking the memory will alleviate the bandwidth limitations, which in turn will yield better scaling when overclocking the GPU. Seeing as NVIDIA specifies 0.5ns memory, it's easy to clock the memory up to 4GHz (up from the reference 3.6GHz), which gives a



Specifications

Core:	675MHz GF104 (40nm)
Processors:	336
Render Outputs:	24
Memory:	768MB GDDR5 3.6GHz (86.4GB/sec)
API:	DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.X

Benchmarks



tangible boost in performance, especially at higher resolutions or when using 3D Vision.

Overall, the Palit GTX460 card is as good a GTX460 as one would expect. For most people it won't be worth paying the price premium for the 1GB version, which makes this an even more attractive purchase. The GeForce GTX460 748MB is the best value for money DX11 card on the market right now. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Overclocking
- + Performance

>Minus

- Reference design

Bottom Line

The best value for money graphics card on the market, with impressive overclocking headroom.

08
out of ten



GIGABYTE GV-N460OC-1GI

EVERY FEW YEARS, WE have the pleasure of reviewing a product that redefines performance and features at a given price point. While we've had some amazing innovations and technological breakthroughs in graphics cards over the last few years, none has been as prolific as the 8800GT. No other graphics card since then has delivered such impressive performance at that price point. The last graphics card to deliver such performance was 2004's 6600GT, and prior to that it was ATI's RADEON 9800 series of graphics processors.

After a very shaky start to their DirectX11 line up with the GTX480 and GTX470, NVIDIA has followed up with quite possibly the most impressive card on the market, and it couldn't have come at a better time, because for the first time in ages, NVIDIA's market share in discreet graphics is behind ATI's at 49%.

So a product priced for the average gamer was necessary and, given the failed GTX465, the GTX460 could not afford to be another disappointing product. Luckily for Graphzilla, they have produced the most exciting product this year in this industry.

As a result of the price point this graphics card was supposed to occupy (\$199 to \$229, which is mid-range) it would have made sense for NVIDIA to halve the GTX480, or the GF100 cores if you will. However, the company actually developed a unique GPU that is not a cut-down version of the GF100 core, but is based largely on that design with some improvements and omissions.

What this translates into is a much smaller core that is down from 3 billion gates to a mere 1.95 billion, and while still larger than its direct competitor in the RADEON 5770, it is smaller than the Cypress core that powers the 5800 series of graphics cards.

Based on the same 40nm node, the significantly smaller die size and the experience gained from successfully preventing the GF100 core from cooking

itself, NVIDIA produced a very lean, power-efficient and high-performance processor.

We will tackle what makes the GF104 an incredible processor at a later stage, but for now it's enough to know that despite being the junior part of the GF100, it is actually more efficient in graphics related tasks and takes the fight to all graphics cards out on the market.

One of the most interesting facets of the GF104 core is that it's probably NVIDIA's best overclocking core to date. In NVIDIA's own presentations, overclocking is encouraged during testing. It is probably this quality that makes it possible for companies such as GIGABYTE to manufacture some intriguing overclocked parts such as the GV-N460OC-1GI card we have here.

Indeed the name is tragic, but that shouldn't put you off what is amongst the best GTX460 cards on the market.

The card makes use of GIGABYTE's WindForce anti-turbulence cooling system which employs angled fans for more effective cooling. Not only does it make the card whisper quiet, it keeps the temperatures low. During testing, the graphics core idled at 26°C and under load reached a respectable 62°C, making it one of the coolest cards we have ever tested.

With the fan turned up to 70 percent, we were able to not only bring the temperature down to the mid 50s, our maximum overclock increased to 850MHz. With voltage modifications via the NVIDIA Inspector tool, we increased the voltage to 1.087V and reached an amazing 900MHz overclock and an impressive 4.4GHz on the memory.

Performance out the box is just amazing to say the least as shown in Unigine's Heaven benchmark, where the GTX460 managed to oust a reference RADEON 5870 graphics card. With some overclocking we managed to record a 3DMark Vantage score of P18,067 and with some more exotic



Specifications

Core:	715MHz GF104 (40nm)
Processors:	336
Render Outputs:	32
Memory:	1024MB GDDR5 3.6GHz (115GB/sec)
API:	DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.X

Benchmarks

	Heaven Benchmark 2.1	896
3DMark Vantage		1,298
3DMark06		15,534
Batman 1920x1080(3D+PhysX On)		21,043
Crysis Warhead (1920x1080)		22,262
Resident Evil 5 (1920x1080 4xAA)		24,999
		43
		49
		5777
		82.04
		90.1
		133.3

Baseline: NVIDIA GTX480

cooling using dry ice, managed to push that score to above P21,900, making it the fastest single GTX460 in the benchmark.

As stated earlier, we will go into the GF104 next month, but right now, the value for money or mid-range market has been turned on its head and the GeForce GTX460 is the reason. If you were looking for an affordable but powerful DirectX11 graphics card to upgrade to, this is the one to buy.

NAG Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

- >Plus**
 - + Incredible performance
 - + Overclocking headroom
 - + Cool and quiet

- >Minus**
 - Requires two 6-pin power connectors

>Bottom Line

DirectX11 done right. The mid-range has a champion worthy of the highest praise.

09
out of ten



GIGABYTE GV-R587SO-1GD

GIGABYTE ISN'T NEW TO manufacturing graphics cards that deviate from the reference design stipulated by IHVs. In fact, you can be guaranteed that any graphics card from GIGABYTE that features a blue PCB has been tweaked somehow by the engineers and brains at GIGABYTE.

While they do have regular and reference versions of the cards like all other manufacturers, their pride lies in the special editions of their SKUs like the Super Overclock Radeon 5870. While any manufacturer can overclock a graphics card and sell it as a special edition, in this day and age that's rather looked down upon unless it's a significant overclock and even then, something extra is needed to make it stand out.

To this end, GIGABYTE has produced their best ATI part to date and that's saying a lot considering just how many graphics cards GIGABYTE has manufactured based on ATI GPUs. Not only have they designed a new PCB from the ground up, they have sorted the GPUs in their GPU Gauntlet system, which means that the GPUs are speed-binned (or cherry picked if you prefer) and only the highest-performing and exceptional GPUs are used in the Super Overclock series. That is what allows GIGABYTE to clock the cards at an incredible 950MHz (up from the standard 850MHz clock) and to a lesser degree, the memory at 5GHz instead of 4.8GHz.

This overclock is quite significant considering that when using the reference card, Catalyst Control Centre will not allow you to clock past 900MHz on the core. What GIGABYTE has done is give you the ability to clock further than this in the control centre, but have also made available a tool they call OC-Guru. This tool, as you would expect, allows you to change VDDC voltage and Vmem voltage. As great as this is, it's cumbersome and over complicated with

only two profiles, but it will fill up a sizeable portion of the screen telling you how many power phases you are using and such. Not important information at all and rather redundant.

However that's not the worst part about OC-Guru. When the graphics card is cooled with Liquid Nitrogen or even Dry Ice, the utility has some strange behaviour where it seems to stutter, and setting clock speeds and voltages can prove quite annoying. However this is only under extreme cooling and for the most part won't be a problem for users.

To deal with the higher clock speeds, GIGABYTE has used a four-heatpipe custom cooler with two anti-turbulence inclined fans. These keep the temperatures low even with the high clock speeds and because of the angling limit, the amount of noise generated by the card. When the graphics card was idling in Windows, the card temperature read 32°C and at maximum load peaked at 70°C, which is still low given that we were using Furmark 1.8, which loads the graphics card more than any other synthetic test or game.

Where game performance is concerned the Super Overclock card performs better than the reference card naturally. The numbers may seem unimpressive sometimes, but it is worth noting that the Cypress GPU is inherently designed to run at high clock speeds so overclocking has a limited amount of benefit. However should you use anti-aliasing at the higher resolutions, the benefit of the overclock will be appreciated. Those that are competitive overclockers will certainly appreciate the card design over and above the increased clock speeds because of the better cooling system and increased power phases (6+1 PWM). In fact a particular overclocker by the name of HiCookie had managed to clock this



Specifications

Core: 950MHz Cypress (40nm)
Processors: 1,600
Render Outputs: 32
Memory: 1,024MB GDDR5 (5,000MHz)
160GB/sec
API: DirectX11/OpenGL3.x, OpenCL 1.0

Benchmarks

	Heaven Benchmark 2.1	
971		971
1,298		1,298
3DMark Vantage		21,758
21,043		21,043
3DMark06		23,874
24,999		24,999
Batman 1920x1080 (3D+PhysX On)		59
49		49
Crysis Warhead (1920x1080)		71.27
82.04		82.04
Resident Evil 5 (1920x1080 4xAA)		111.2
133.3		133.3

Baseline: NVIDIA GTX480

graphics card well above 1.4GHz, and at one time made it the highest clocking graphics card ever.

As far as Radeon 5870 graphics cards are concerned, there aren't many better than this one. It may not have the 2GB of that a few others have, but it is clocked higher and features an equally impressive component list. As stated earlier this is the best ATI part to come from GIGABYTE ever.

NAG

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Huge overclock
+ Quiet
+ Good performance

>Minus
- OC-Guru

>Bottom Line

Amongst the best Radeon 5870 graphics cards on the market, faultless in design.

08
out of ten



SPARKLE GW EPS1000DA

OVER THE LAST FEW years PSU manufacturers have adopted a new certification system: Bronze, Silver and Gold, which has led to them producing PSUs capable of higher loads than they claim. However, for us to test a Power Supply accurately requires specific equipment which we don't have. While it is easy to add devices to the unit until it trips, or track the voltage reading via a multi meter, this isn't an accurate or reliable way to test a PSU, after all the rating systems are given based on the amount of noise, ripple and such, which are measured with specialized equipment. However it would be unfair to expect every user before buying a PSU to test a unit using oscilloscopes and load testers, because ultimately it will be how the unit handles the hardware you have that will determine what one thinks about a PSU.

To this end the SPARKLE unit was more than able to power our system with everything we could throw at it. Despite our initial concerns with the low current 12V+ rails (rated at 18A for all six) it managed to power all the graphics cards we had in various configurations without much issue.

Swapping out the IKONIK unit we have used for years did not decrease our maximum overclocks or anything of the sort. Unfortunately we could not test the unit with the system under exotic cooling, because on the UD9 (and pretty much any extreme overclocker motherboard) there are

NAG

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Total Power: 1000W
12V Rails: 6 x 18A
Efficiency: 80% +
Features: Quad Crossfire, Quad SLI support, 3-Way SLI, ATX 2.2, EPS 12V

two 6-pin 12V ATX connectors and this PSU only features one. When we contacted the supplier about this they advised that they would add a cable to solve this issue.

The PSU has a fully thermal controlled fan, which cannot be manually controlled but does vary the rotation speed according to load. Even after the machine has been turned off, the fan continues to spin to rid the unit of excess heat, which is one of the accelerators of component degradation in PSUs.

Unlike some cheaper PSUs, it uses a dual-layer PCB, 100A MOS FET 12V rectifiers and a triple AC EMC filtering stage. Most important to the user though (especially locally) is the dual-capacitor protection system which protects not only the PSU itself but the rest of the system in the case of sudden power loss. As a testament to the quality of the unit, SPARKLE offers a 5-year warranty (you have to register on the site), which is amongst the longest warranties available in the industry for PSUs.

NAG

THE SCORE

- >**PLUS**
 - + Component list
 - + Features
 - + Intelligent thermal design

- >**MINUS**
 - None, since SPARKLE will now supply an additional ATX 12V connector

Bottom Line

SPARKLE has produced good power supply with an impressive warranty and an even more impressive component list.

07
out of ten

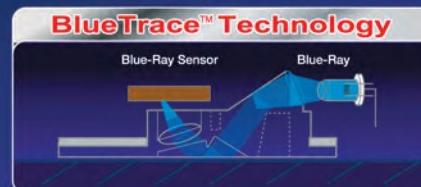
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MSI Big Bang-XPower

IF MSI WAS EVER going to make a motherboard worthy of the highest praise, it was always going to the XPower. It's because this motherboard exists that we can finally be quite frank and say without reserve that the other Big Bang motherboards were very poor in comparison.

It's amazing and quite puzzling to think that the XPower comes from the same company that produced the Eclipse, which is light years behind the XPower in every way, even though the Eclipse was MSI's best effort at the time.

So before we get into what makes this motherboard great, let's deal with what is wrong with it, because make no mistake, it is far from a perfect motherboard and sometimes just downright frustrating. However what it does right far outshines all our niggles, and if you've never been a fan of MSI products, you can start with this one, because it really is an impressive piece of engineering.

This motherboard, much like the UD9 from GIGABYTE and the Rampage III Extreme from ASUS, is largely targeted at the overclocker. MSI states that it's for the extreme gamer, but we disagree because we don't believe there is such a thing as an "extreme gamer". There are, however, "extreme overclockers" and this motherboard is almost everything such a user could want on a motherboard.

This is, however, a downright frustrating motherboard sometimes, and it may make you pull your hair out. For instance, overclocking this motherboard using a 980X Core i7 and 6GB of Corsair CL7 1600MHz proved very difficult. Getting up to speed on any other motherboard took less than 37 seconds (yes we actually timed it), on the XPower it was an hour later and we were still struggling with getting up to speed (think DFI).

It turned out that the B2B setting in the BIOS (V1.2) is set at "0" which is supposed to be Auto as a "0" isn't actually possible. Setting this to 4 or 6 immediately fixed the POST problem. However we also ran into a QPI voltage issue where to get the 200MHz

BClk and 3.6GHz NB frequency required 1.41 Volts. Not a problem really, but on other motherboards, this setting didn't need any tuning at all and Auto takes care of it.

The woes of the XPower do not stop there; the motherboard isn't necessarily attractive especially considering that it's MSI's premier motherboard. The Northbridge cooler is disappointing, and the motherboard is cramped.

These are all real issues with the motherboard, but once you look past them, there's an amazing product. In fact, given that the retail price of this motherboard is significantly less than that of the Rampage III Extreme and definitely that of the GIGABYTE X58A-UD9, for value alone it's the best of the lot.

For the price, it supports 4-way SLI and Crossfire (it'll be very cramped so keep that in mind) and has the best audio controller of them all. MSI calls it the Quantum Wave, and is an audio riser card which fits into a single lane PCI-Express slot. It supports all connection methods you can think of, but unlike the others, has full Creative EAX5.0 HD support, is THX certified, supports Creative Alchemy for using this EAX functionality and just on pure signal clarity, it beats all other on-board solutions by some distance.

Aside from all of the above, when it comes to the feature set, there's just too much to mention here, from the included OC-Dashboard (think of it as a very basic OC-station) to the voltage measuring points and voltage boost DIP switch, the XPower isn't lacking in innovation and power (16-phase PWM). Where overclocking is concerned the XPower doesn't disappoint in the slightest. The BIOS takes some getting used to but it has every option you would ever need and it was capable of matching and beating the Rampage III Extreme (highest validation) when using air cooling.

There's only one word to describe this motherboard: fantastic. MSI has outdone itself with the XPower. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Specifications

Chipset: Intel X58 + ICH10R
Memory banks: 4xDDR3 240-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i7 (1366)
Slots: 6x PCI-E 16X (16x)

Benchmarks

CineBench 11.5	9.30
	9.34
3DMark Vantage CPU	33,658
	33,737
Everest Read	17,099
	17,111
Everest Write	16,585
	16,627
Everest Copy	16,460
	16,441
Everest Latency	48.5
	49.1
Super Pi 8M	125.266
	125.175

Baseline: ASUS Rampage III Gene

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Features
- + 4-way SLI
- + Quantum Wave

>Minus

- PCI-Express Spacing
- Looks boring
- Tricky overclocking

>Bottom Line

The XPower is not only the best Big Bang motherboard, it's by far the best product to ever come from MSI.

09
out of ten



GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD3R

WE REGULARLY REVIEW AND thoroughly test high-end GIGABYTE motherboards. Over the last year or two they have manufactured some of the best products the industry has seen. With that said, most of these products are geared at the very high-end, and, as unfortunate as this is to say, the truth is that the vast majority of people cannot afford to spend more than R3,000 on a motherboard.

With that said, GIGABYTE does manufacture cheaper motherboards and those are typically denoted at the UD4 and lower moniker (UD5 would previously be a budget solution, but these days it's a high-end product much like the UD6 and higher). With cheaper motherboards, you'd usually expect not only fewer features but inferior component quality, but this isn't the case with the UD3R. It's the lowest model in GIGABYTE's X58 line up, but don't let the model name or pricing fool you. It really is a capable motherboard, and we'd go as far as to say it is a better motherboard than the previous high-end EX58-Extreme; maybe not in features but in component quality, performance and stability.

It's the typical X58 feature set that is expected because prices must be kept low (no nForce 200 chip), but GIGABYTE has outfitted an additional four SATA 6Gbps ports (through a third-party MARVEL controller). That means the motherboard supports up to a maximum of 10 storage drives, and if you use the IDE port as well, that can grow up to 12 drives, impressive for a budget motherboard.

The UD3R doesn't have the copious amounts of PCI-Express slots that the UD9 has (seven), but it does feature 3-way SLI and Crossfire support as well. It has no third-party controller to allow the full bandwidth of the PCI-Express lanes, so any 3-way configuration splits the 32 lanes in the X58 chipset into three 8X lanes and the others are left to the dual lane PCI-Express slots and a single 4X PCI-Express slot. There's no POST LED, power or reset buttons on

the board, but these are not vital since this isn't an overclocker's board but meant for mainstream users more than anything.

What is present though is a clear CMOS button, which may seem odd at first given the absence of every other button that goes with it, but after having spent time overclocking this motherboard, it's easy to understand why it's there.

Without question this is by far the easiest motherboard we have ever had to overclock. From the first boot, all settings were set once and the system was stable with a 200MHz Bclk, 3.6GHz NB and CPU frequency. It was the quickest overclock we had ever performed on any system, and, best of all, NB overclocking was very impressive with the CPU reaching a very respectable 4.2GHz using air cooling. By and large, NB clocking of the Gulltown CPUs is lower than that of the Bloomfield CPUs, so this makes that overclock that much more surprising.

Frequency and voltage stability is impressive, to say the least, courtesy of the 12-phase PWM power system which is very impressive considering that motherboards of this price point usually have an eight-phase or lower power circuitry.

Above all else though, the most impressive aspect of this motherboard was just how much faster it was in 3DMark Vantage than anything we have tested before. The motherboard was in the order of 400 points faster than the X58A-UD9 in the CPU test. Such a discrepancy in the score isn't within the margin of error and just points to some other optimisations which we will happily accept.

With more tweaking there's no doubt it will get even faster, and, while we have not tested the motherboard under sub-zero temperatures, we have no doubt it is more than capable of matching other more expensive motherboards from GIGABYTE. For a budget board it is anything but that in performance and features. It's hard to fault this motherboard on anything really. **NAG Neo Sibeko**

Specifications

Chipset: Intel X58 + ICH10R
Memory banks: 4 x DDR3 240-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i7 (1366)
Slots: 4 x PCI-E 16X, 2 x PCI-Express 2X, 1 x PCI



Benchmarks

CineBench 11.5	9.32
	9.34
3DMark Vantage CPU	33,926
	33,737
Everest Read	16,583
	17,111
Everest Write	16,585
	16,627
Everest Copy	16,365
	16,441
Everest Latency	49.1
	49.1
Super Pi 8M	125,393
	125,175

Baseline: ASUS Rampage III Gene

THE SCORE

>Plus
 + Great performance
 + Affordable
 + Super easy to overclock

>Minus
 - No BIOS POST LED

Bottom Line

A budget motherboard with high-end features, superb performance and amazing overclocking headroom.

08
out of ten



ASUS Rampage III GENE

IT SHOULD NOT BE a surprise anymore that for every Rampage Extreme motherboard ASUS makes, they produce an equivalent GENE model, a good thing for the industry and small-form-factor PC users the world over. If it were not for the GENE motherboards, these users would be limited to sub-standard motherboards, which usually lack features, as motherboard manufacturers save as much as they can when dealing with this form factor.

While we liked the Rampage II GENE, we were at first puzzled as to how this third iteration could improve on what was already a great motherboard. For the most part the Rampage II GENE was as perfect as any one MICRO-ATX motherboard could be.

From a marketing point of view, we see the importance of the Rampage III GENE, but outside of that and from our experience with it, it isn't significantly better than the motherboard it succeeds, and in some aspects is a lesser part. (No LCD Poster and no 3DMark included.)

Fundamentally, it offers nothing over the previous board; in fact you lose the ability to use the OC-Station with the motherboard, which is annoying, as that's an investment we would have hoped ASUS would continue to support in all their ROG motherboards. Not only does it not have OC-Station support, it uses the same PLL as the Crosshair IV that makes it impossible to nail down the exact frequency you desire. It does this to a lesser degree but it's still the same problem because 3,600MHz is impossible, as it becomes 3,608MHz and your 800MHz memory setting turns into 802MHz. A small annoyance no doubt but one that we wish was just not there at all.

As a result of not supporting the OC-Station and because there's no POST LED, it's virtually impossible for you to know what is happening with the system other than by looking on the screen (or using ROG connect). When overclocking, once again the lack of OC-Station supports means you are limited to ASUS's own

tool which has always been far inferior to any other overclocking software there is on the market. Luckily though SetFSB does work, and you can easily use that program to adjust Bclk and CPU Tweaker to adjust clock multiplier.

Besides the addition of USB 3.0 and an overall better looking board, there really isn't anything new here. The motherboard features the same 8-phase PWM power design, and while the new Audio controller is THX certified and has EAX 5.0 HD support, it's by and large the same audio experience. In essence the Rampage III GENE is a better representation of the Rampage II Extreme rather than the brilliant Rampage III Extreme.

Try as we may, there just isn't anything compelling enough to make this a worthwhile upgrade for anyone who has the previous version, unless aesthetics are that important to you, in which case we do admit this is a much better looking product.

Overclocking wise, it has a few new features that are carried over from the Rampage III Extreme, but some are missing like N2 mode. Not a problem really, seeing as very few extreme overclockers would use the Micro-ATX board for such activities when the full Extended ATX board is available.

We had no problems overclocking this motherboard and it proved to be a relatively simple affair. A few issues made diagnosing why our GEIL Black Dragon set wouldn't POST, (again no POST LED to tell you it's a memory problem) but once we swapped out our RAM and set the relevant setting for the Black Dragon set, it proved to be rock solid, pushing out some impressive numbers and as per usual for ASUS motherboards, proved very efficient in Wprime and SuperPI.

Overall, this is a good product. If you want the best the Micro-ATX has to offer, look no further than the Rampage III (or Rampage II for that matter) GENE. We wish there was a little more in this one, but that doesn't make it any less of an impressive product.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Chipset: Intel X58 + ICH10R
Memory banks: 6xDDR3 240-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i7 (1366)
Slots: 2x PCI-E 16X (16x), 1x PCI-E4X

Benchmarks

Cinebench 11.5	9.34
	9.34
SuperPi 8M	2:05.172
	2:05.172
Everest Read	17,111
	17,111
Everest Write	16,627
	16,627
Everest Copy	16,441
	16,441
Everest Latency	49.1
	49.1
3DMark Vantage CPU	33,737
	33,737

Baseline: ASUS Rampage III Gene

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Looks great
- + USB3.0
- + Fast WPrime performance

>Minus

- Very Hot ICH
- Not better than the previous board

>Bottom Line

Once again ASUS produces the best Micro-ATX board money can buy, although it's not a vast improvement over its predecessor.

07
out of ten



Freecom Hard Drive Quattro 500GB

THE FREECOM HARD DRIVE Quattro 500GB is an external HDD aimed at users who have a variety of different needs, namely speed, compatibility and portability, as well as the capacity for large volumes of data that would generally be too large for a flash drive.

Upon inspection, the build quality is superb, with the hard drive protected by a stylish brushed aluminium enclosure that doubles as the passive cooling solution. What this means is the Quattro remains cool and quiet even after hours of heavy operation. All the required cables are bundled with the device as well as the power brick, which is compatible with many different plug types, making the Quattro ready for out of the box usage. Sporting four different input types, the Quattro can be used almost anywhere: Firewire 400 and 800 for Mac compatibility, eSATA for maximum speed, and USB2.0 for universal compatibility. Speed is maxed out on three of the connections, while on eSATA an average of 60mb/s (real world scenario) shows the Quattro is

Specifications

Capacity: 500GB
Interfaces: eSATA, FireWire 800/400 & USB 2.0
Power: A/C adapter 12V/2A
Weight: 1.4kg

far from a slouch. The drive in the Quattro comes preformatted to the FAT32 file system in order to increase compatibility across platforms. However, since we were testing this drive on a PC, a quick format to NTFS led to measurable improvements in speed as well as the ability to transfer files in excess of 4GB, among other benefits.

The Freecom Quattro is of high quality, solidly built unit, and offers a variety of connections allowing compatibility with almost any PC out there. In addition, the drive is silent and cool, with a comprehensive bundle making the deal sweeter. It's a great product for someone in the market for a high-capacity external drive. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

THE SCORE

>**PLUS**
 + Build quality
 + Multiple interfaces

>**MINUS**
 - None

Bottom Line

A well built, versatile product that finds the balance between portability and speed.

09
out of ten



Micro Traveler 900LS
Wireless 2.4GHz/1600dpi



SP-i160
Portable Speaker



HS-200A
Stereo Ear-Bud Headset



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GIGABYTE M8000Xtreme Gaming Mouse

GIGABYTE IS NORMALLY A brand you would associate with graphics cards and motherboard, so a gaming mouse is a new avenue for it to explore. It also happens to be a brand that gives us some of the best hardware out there, with amazing build quality and features galore. Will the M8000Xtreme follow this tradition?

The M8000X has an impressive list of features that puts it right up there with the best that established brands like Razer and Logitech have to offer. A 6,000dpi laser sensor, adjustable on the fly sensitivity, a detailed weight adjusting system, and nine programmable buttons round off the standout features. On the fly sensitivity is the best we have seen on any mouse. A single unobtrusive button just below the scroll wheel slides forwards to increase sensitivity, and backwards to decrease it while four lights show current sensitivity. The button is responsive and accessible during games, a real treat. The weight system is also well designed, allowing almost anyone to be at home with the mouse. Consisting of one 20g weight and three 6g weights, the weights are installed at the rear end underside of the mouse allowing for balanced control, making the M8000X feel as free as a wireless mouse. A superb software utility to control the mouse rounds off an excellent package.

There is, however, one issue, which may be a deal breaker for some people: the



HARDWARE



Specifications

- Resolution:** Up to 6,000 DPI
- FPS:** 12,000
- Maximum Acceleration:** 30g
- Maximum Speed:** 150 inches/second



positioning of the side buttons. They're not uncomfortable as such, but when judged beside its peers from Logitech, the M8000X may initially be awkward and will take some getting used to. However, if you can get past this fact, the M8000X from GIGABYTE is an excellent gaming mouse, just as good as the competition from the bigger peripheral companies. If you're in the market for a gaming mouse, the M8000X deserves your attention.

NAG

Derrick Cramer

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + One-the-fly sensitivity adjustment
- + Weight system

>Minus

- Side buttons take some getting used to

>Bottom Line

A superb package from GIGABYTE, as good as the best out there.

09
out of ten

Thermaltake Challenger Pro

THERMALTAKE, A PREDOMINANTLY CASE-orientated company, has produced the Challenger Pro gaming keyboard. In terms of features, the Challenger Pro offers everything you could want from a gaming keyboard and more. There's a backlight with varying intensity, ten programmable macro keys, and from an aesthetics standpoint, it certainly looks the part. There are, however, one or two unique features worth mentioning. Firstly, it has a detachable data cable. It doesn't sound like much, but it makes transporting the keyboard easier and lessens the chance of damage en route to LANs. Secondly, the much-advertised hand fan. Sliding out from a storage compartment inside the keyboard, the fan can be plugged into one of two ports above the function keys and angled to blow cool air over either hand. At first we laughed at this feature, but after many hours of gaming we could feel the difference. It would be especially useful if you're the type of gamer who sweats a lot while you play. The bundle is also impressive, with spare replacement keys and pouches for the cable and keyboard.

However, there are one or two downsides to this product. Firstly, there is the build quality, or lack thereof. The keys are extremely fragile, the hand cooling fan feels flimsy when placed in its socket, and the keyboard is prone to slide around compared to other keyboards in



Specifications

- Backlight:** All keys
- Display:** Multimedia keys, Predefined shortcuts, Programmable keys
- Special keys:** Built-in USB hub, Multi-key input
- Body:** Low profile
- Dimensions: 7.68 in x 1.06 in x 19.88 in

this category. Having low-profile keys is a plus, as they feel far more responsive than higher profile keys, but they don't offer the level of grip you'd expect as a dedicated gamer, and your fingers are prone to slide off the keys at times.

What we have here is a good attempt at a keyboard, with a few innovative features in a market segment that is full of "more of the same".

NAG

Derrick Cramer

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Flat, comfortable keys
- + Detachable data cable
- + Hand-cooling fan

>Minus

- Quality

>Bottom Line

A decent product with all the features you could want from a gaming keyboard.

06
out of ten

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By Tarryn van der Byl

For the love of the game, unfortunately

BLAME WESTERN SENTIMENTALITY. Of course, I blame Western sentimentalism for all sorts of villainy – romantic comedies, political correctness, anything with stupid vampires in it – but its most insidious crime must surely be telling children they can be anything they want to be. From a developmental psychology perspective, children are pretty much like wet blobs of cement in a council housing estate – excessively impressionable, and tragically susceptible to permanent conceits like, "I ****ED S.F. BY THE BINS 24-06-10 LOL". Tell a child they can be anything they want to be, and they'll grow up believing it.

And so we have stuff like fan-fiction – shamelessly extravagant transgressions against literature, almost invariably committed by the sorts of people who have no business whatsoever typing sentences, much less managing the exquisite subtleties of character development, narrative exposition, and spelling. Because although they're convinced they can be credible authors, they probably couldn't tell bathos from pathos in a prompted police line-up.

We also have stuff like *The Silver Lining: Episode 1*, previously *King's Quest: The Silver Lining*. It's a fan-made sort-of-sequel to whatever *King's Quest* you'd consider the final one in the original Sierra series*, developed over a decade by a bunch of amateurs under the rather grand and disingenuously obvious name, Phoenix Online Studios. I say "sort-of-sequel" because, well, it's complete rubbish, but also because it's not so much a sequel as it is a compilation of recurring characters and locations, bad-in-jokes, and horrid dialogue pretending to be a game. All intents and purposes notwithstanding, *The Silver Lining: Episode 1* is basically *King's Quest* fan-fiction with ghastly

3D graphics, retarded path finding algorithms, and some of the worst voice acting this side of JRPGs.

The problem here is that gamers who had no business whatsoever being game developers thought they could be game developers. Here's the logic, presented as a clever pastiche of fan-fiction:

Hypothetical Phoenix Online Studios founder #1: "OMG I TOTALLY LOVE KING'S QUEST LOL."

Hypothetical Phoenix Online Studios founder #2: "OMG ME TOO LET'S MAKE OUR OWN KING'S QUEST LOL."

Hypothetical Phoenix Online Studios founder #1: "OMG LOL." They have sex

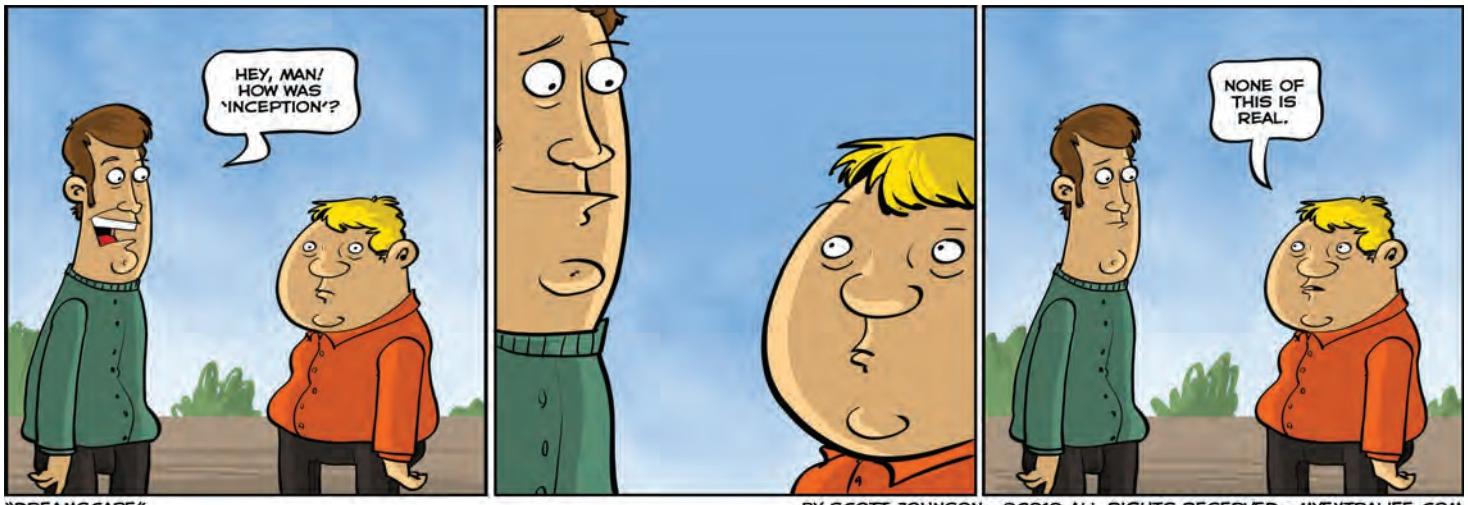


See, just because these guys love games doesn't mean they understand how and why those games work. The massively complex process of game design has been reduced to a checklist of characters, sequential interactions, and tedious fan service with the naive assumption that this somehow turns into a game somewhere along the way. It's kind of like thinking you can write a clump of sentences with nouns and verbs and conjunctions, and call it a novel. Stephenie Meyer should totally hang out with Phoenix Online Studios – I'm sure they'd have loads to talk about. **NAG**

* *Mask of Eternity?* Never heard of it.

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PlayStation®Move motion controller

Start immersing yourself in the most innovative games ever created with the PlayStation®Move motion controller, it is your gateway into a gaming experience like no other. Combining advanced motion sensors, a dynamic colour changing sphere, vibration function, and an easy to use button interface, the motion controller allows you to inhabit and engage with games in ways you never imagined. Move and play your way through Blu-ray Disc powered HD worlds and enjoy innovative experiences that only PlayStation®Move can deliver.

PlayStation®Eye

Revolutionise your interactive gaming and online communication experience with the PlayStation®Eye camera, it has the ability to reduce background noise and focus on the spoken word for smoother, more accurate speech recognition and transfer. The fast frame rate allows for improved tracking and responsiveness for pristine video quality. The PlayStation®Eye is also engineered to perform well in low-light conditions and includes a dual action lens for close-up and full body options.

PlayStation®Move navigation controller

The wireless navigation controller is a must have for core gamers. This supplementary controller adds directional buttons, an analog stick, and two shoulder buttons into the PlayStation®Move control scheme. Used in games that require you to control and steer an in-game character, the navigation controller replicates the control features of the left side of the DUALSHOCK®3 wireless controller, making movement through the gaming environment easy, intuitive and enjoyable.

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